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JEAN RACINE.

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THE DRAMATIC WORKS
OF
JEAN RACINE

A METRICAL ENGLISH VERSION

BY

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
BAJAZET	1
MITHRIDATES	69
IPHIGENIA	133
PHÆDRA	203
ESTHER*	269
ATHALIAH	327

BAJAZET.

1672.

INTRODUCTION TO BAJAZET.

THE time to which this tragedy relates is much later than that of any other of Racine's historical plays. The capture of Babylon (or rather Bagdad) from the Persians by Sultan Amurath IV., on which the catastrophe of the plot depends, occurred only a year before the poet's birth, viz., 1638; and our author thought it desirable to justify himself for choosing a subject so recent by the precedent of Æschylus, whose "Persæ" commemorated the abortive expedition of Xerxes against Greece, in which struggle he had himself taken an active part. The unfamiliar manners and customs of the distant East may compensate in some measure, he maintains, for proximity in point of time. Racine derived his information about the circumstances of Bajazet's death from the narrative of the Comte de Cézay, who was French ambassador at Constantinople at the time, and had some personal knowledge of the unfortunate prince.

CHARACTERS.

BAJAZET, *Brother of Sultan Amurath.*

ROKANA, *Sultana, the favourite of Sultan Amurath.*

ATALIDE, *a Turkish Damsel of Royal Blood.*

ACHMET, *the Grand Vizier.*

OSMAN, *Friend of the Grand Vizier.*

FATIMA, *a Slave of the Sultana.*

ZARA, *a Slave of Atalide.*

Guards.

The scene is laid at Constantinople, formerly called Byzantium,
in the seraglio of the Sultan.

BAJAZET.

ACT I.

Scene 1.

ACHMET, OSMAN.

ACHMET.

- Come, follow me. Here the Sultana comes
• Anon: meanwhile we may converse together.

OSMAN.

How long, my lord, has entrance been allow'd
To these forbidden præcinets, where so lately
The eyes that dared to pry would soon have closed
In death?

ACHMET.

When you have heard all that has pass'd,
You will not be surprised that I am free
To enter. But enough of that, dear Osman.

How long to my impatience seem'd the time
Of your return! How glad am I to see you
Here in Stamboul! What secrets have you learn'd
By travelling so far on my behalf?
Tell me sincerely what your eyes have seen;
Consider, Osman, that on your report
The future fortune of the Crescent hangs.
How fares it with the army and the Sultan?

OSMAN.

True to her prince, did Babylon, unmoved
By terror, see our hosts her walls encompass ;
The muster'd Persians to her aid were marching ,
And daily nearer drew to Amurath's camp.
He, weary with the tedious, fruitless siege,
Seem'd willing to leave Babylon at rest,
And, without making fresh assaults in vain,
Was waiting for the Persians, to give battle.
But, as you know, Sir, make what haste I might,
Long is the journey hither from those parts ;
A thousand obstacles my course impeded,
Nor can I tell all that has happened since.

ACHMET.

Our valiant janizaries—how did they
Comport themselves ? Do they to Amurath yield
Faithful allegiance ? Can you read men's hearts ?
Enjoy the Sultan undisputed pow'r ?

OSMAN.

If one may take his word, he is content,
And seem'd full confident of victory.
But his apparent calmness cannot cheat us,
He knows not the repose that he assumes.
In vain he masks habitual distrust,
And grants his janizaries easy access ;
He cannot but remember how he wish'd
To pare that gallant force of half its strength,
And, as he said, to 'scape their tutelage.
Oft have I heard them talk among themselves
How Amurath fears them, and how they fear him ;
That sore still galls them, flatter as he may.
They murmur at your absence, and regret
The time so dear to their courageous hearts,
When under you, sure of success, they fought.

ACHMET.

What ! Think you, Osman, that my glory still
In their remembrance lives and stirs their valour ?

That they would gladly follow me again,
And hail the voice of their vizier with welcome?

OSMAN.

The fortune of the fight will rule their conduct :
They must see Amurath's victory or defeat.
Though loath, my lord, to march with him to lead them,
They have to keep unstain'd their martial glory :
They'll not betray honour so hardly won.
But failure or success depends on fate.
If, seconding their valour, Amurath's star
Awards him victory on Babylon's plains,
Then will you see them to Byzantium bring
Submissive homage and a blind obedience ;
But if the heavy hand of destiny
Crush in the conflict his aspiring schemes
Of empire, doubt not his disgraceful flight
Would spur their hatred on to bold contempt,
And his disasters would to them appear
High Heav'n's decree of wrath and reprobation.
Meanwhile, if Rumour's voice has spoken truly,
Three months ago he from the army sent
Hither a slave charged with some secret message.
All in the camp trembled for Bajazet,
Fearing the Sultan had with cruel order
Despatch'd him to demand his brother's head.

• •

ACHMET.

Such was his purpose. Ay, that slave has come,
And shown his mandate—which was disregarded.

OSMAN.

What! shall the Sultan see that slave again
Without this pledge of your allegiance rendered?

ACHMET.

The slave is dead. A secret order cast him
Full many a fathom deep beneath the Euxine.

OSMAN.

His lengthen'd absence will surprise the Sultan ;
Soon will he seek the cause, and take revenge.
What will you answer him ?

ACHMET

Perchance ere then
He'll have more pressing matters to engage him.
I know that Amurath has sworn my ruin,
I know what welcome his return will bring me.
To tear me from his soldiers' hearts, behold
How he excludes me from his fights and sieges ;
Himself commands the army and leaves me
Here in Stamboul t'exert a pow'r that's useless.
What base employment, Osman, for a vizier !
But I have used my time to worthier purpose,
And terrible surprises have prepared him ;
Soon will the news thereof make his ears tingle.

OSMAN.

What have you done ?

ACHMET.

I hope that Bajazet
To-day will mount the throne,—with him Roxana.

OSMAN.

Roxana, my good lord ! whom Amurath chose
As fairest of that fair array which fill'd
His court, from Europe and from Asia gather'd
In countless numbers, who alone has fix'd
The Sultan's heart, they say, whom he has named
Sultana, though no son she yet has borne him.

ACHMET.

Ay, more, dear Osman. He has will'd that she
Should in his absence wield supreme command.
You know the rigour that our Sultans practise ;
Brothers are seldom suffer'd to enjoy

The dangerous honour of their royal rank
Related to their own by ties too near.
The brainless Ibrahim, from peril free,
Needs not to curse his birth, perpetual childhood
Secures his safety, he, in life or death
Alike contemn'd, is left to those who deign
To feed him. With the other 'tis not so,
Of Amurath's jealous fear a worthier object,
Which every moment threatens his destruction:
For Bajazet has ever scorned to live
In slothful ease, like other sultans' sons.
War was his favourite pastime from his boyhood,
And practice under me has made him perfect.
Have you not seen him charge where foes were thickest
With courage that bewitch'd each soldier's heart,
And stain'd with carnage, reap the rare delight
Which valour's earliest triumph brings to youth?
But cruel Amurath, 'spite of jealous fears,
Dared not (before he had a son to make
Succession sure) wreak upon Bajazet
His vengeance, cutting short the royal stock.
So for a time was Amurath's rage disarm'd,
And Bajazet left prisoner in the palace.

He went, and will'd that, faithful to his hatred,
Holding his brother's life at her disposal,
Roxana, at the slightest breath of rumour,
The least suspicion giv'n, no reason else,
Should slay him. I, left here, justly incensed,
Soon turn'd my wishes to the brother's side.
Hiding my purpose, to the young Sultana
I show'd how Amurath's return was doubtful,
The murmurs of the camp, war's fickle fortunes,
Praised Bajazet, and made her pity him,
Dwelt on his charms, so jealously conceal'd,
So near her eyes yet never seen by her.
In short, so well I work'd upon Roxana
That she was all impatient to behold him.

OSMAN.

But could they frustrate keen-eyed vigilance,
And overstep the barriers placed between them?

ACHMET.

You may perhaps remember how the tidings,
 False as they proved, of Amurath's death were spread
 In feign'd alarm Roxana heard the rumour,
 And with loud cries of grief strove to confirm it
 Trusting the witness of those tears, her slaves
 Trembled, and those who guarded Bajazet,
 In their perplexity by bribes corrupted,
 Relax'd their watchful care; when the Sultana
 Found means to see the prince, and in his ear
 Whisper'd the secret order she was charged with.
 No churl is Bajazet, and, when he saw
 That safety lay in pleasing her, full soon
 He pleased her well. To aid him all conspired,
 Her kindly care, their mutual understanding
 Based on the secret shared, sighs all the sweeter
 For being stolen, silence that provoked
 Wishes they dared not utter, fears and danger
 Common to both, united them together;
 Whilst those whose eyes should have observed them closely,
 Failed to resume the duty once neglected.

OSMAN.

What! did Roxana from the first make known
 Her heart to them, and to their eyes reveal
 Her flame?

ACHMET.

They know it not, and till to-day
 On their intrigue has Atalide bestow'd
 The shelter of her name,—the niece, you know,
 Of Amurath's sire, who with his children shared
 His fondness, and with them her childhood pass'd.
 She, as it seem'd, his tender vows received,
 But only to convey them to Roxana,
 The willing instrument to aid their passion.
 And to secure my countenance, dear Osmian,
 Both have agreed that Atalide shall be
 My bride.

OSMAN.

You love her, then!

ACHMET.

Would'st have me learn

Now at my age the worthless lore of love?
And shall a heart that years of toil have harden'd
Blindly submit to follow vain delights?
Nay, she attracts my gaze with other charms,
I love in her the blood of royal sires.
Through this alliance to the throne brought near
By Bajazet, I thus secure a shield
To guard myself against him. Some offence
Is sure to rise, for scarcely has vizier
Been chosen ere the Sultan fears his creature,
And greed or envy soon effects his ruin.
To-day he honours me and courts my favour,
The risks he runs incline his heart toward me.
But establish'd on the throne, this Bajazet
Perchance will throw aside a useless friend:
And, if my faithful service be forgotten,
The day may come when he will dare to doom me
To death—. I say no more, but 'tis my purpose
To keep him waiting for my head full long.
I know the duty that I owe my masters,
But 'tis for slaves to humour their caprices,
Nor am I so besotted as to lick
The hand that strikes me.

Thus it comes to pass

That I within these walls have free admittance,
And with mine eyes may look upon Roxana.
At first she listen'd to my voice, herself
Unseen, and fear'd to break the rigid laws
That guard the harem. But those irksome scruples,
Our converse hampering, ere long were banish'd.
She has herself chosen this nook remote
Where eyes may hearts discover unrestrain'd.
A slave conducts me by a secret passage—
But here she comes, with her loved Atalide.
Stay, and be ready, should there need arise,
To ratify the statement I shall make her.

Scene 2.

ROXANA, ATALIDE, ACHMET, OSMAN, FATIMA, ZARA.

ACHMET.

Truth, Lady, has confirm'd the voice of Rumour;
Osman has seen the Sultan and the army.
Proud Amurath is ever ill at ease,
And all hearts ever turn to Bajazet;
With one consent they call him to the throne.
The Persian hosts, meanwhile, to Babylon
Were marching, and the rival camp will soon
Meet 'neath her walls to try the chance of battle,
Which must decide, they say, our destinies;
And, counting up the days of Osman's journey,
Heav'n has already settled the event,
And Amurath triumphs now, or flies defeated.
Let us break silence, and declare ourselves,
From this day forth shutting our gates against him,
Nor wait to learn the issue of the conflict,
But hasten to anticipate the tidings.
If he has lost, what fear you? Has he won?
Then are the promptest measures the most safe,
Delay too long, and failure must attend
Our efforts to seduce a people ready
To welcome home their sovereign. I have gain'd
Th' expounders of our sacred law, intriguing
In secret. Well I know religion's pow'r
To turn the multitude this way or that.
Let Bajazet go forth beyond the walls,
And cease to be a prisoner in this palace.
This fateful standard in his name display,
Our wonted signal when the State's in danger.
The people, in his favour prepossess'd,
Know that his virtue is his only crime.
Besides a vague report that I have foster'd
Has spread alarm, and made them think the Sultan
Disdains them and is minded to remove
His presence and his throne far from Byzantium.

Let us declare what danger overhangs
His brother's head, and show the cruel order
Address'd to you ; let Bajazet assert
His claim, and mount the throne, with courage worthy
Of royalty.

ROXANA.

Enough, I will maintain
All I have promised. Go, brave Achmet, gather
Our friends, their feelings sound, then bring report
Of all, and you shall find my answer ready.
I will see Bajazet. Nought can I say
Till of his heart assured as one with mine.
Go, and return.

Scene 3.

ROXANA, ATALIDE, FATIMA, ZARA.

ROXANA.

At length, fair Atalide,
Must Bajazet decide my destiny.
Now for the last time will I question him,
And learn if I am loved.

ATALIDE.

Can you yet doubt it?
Hasten, dear lady, to complete your work.
Did you not hear what Achmet said to urge you?
Is Bajazet beloved? Think that to-morrow
His liberty and life may be no longer
In your control. Perchance this very moment
The Sultan comes in fury to destroy him.
Why is it that you doubt his heart to-day?

ROXANA.

Will you be surety, e'en as you have been
His advocate?

ATALIDE.

The care he takes to please you,
All you have done, all you can do for him,
His danger, and his homage to your charms,
Do not all these assure you of his love?
Doubt not your kindness lives in his remembrance.

ROXANA.

Ah! it would give me peace, could I believe it!
But why then speaks he not, my fears to banish,
As I am told by others that he feels?
Relying on your words, full twenty times
Have I enjoy'd a foretaste of his heart's
Emotion, and, in my desire to prove
His passion true, conferr'd with him in secret.
My eagerness may make me hard to please,
But, to cut short a long and tedious story,
I found but little of that amorous ardour
Which flattering lips had led me to expect.
In short, if I to him give life and empire,
I must have pledges that I cannot doubt.

ATALIDE.

How do you then propose to test his passion?

ROXANA.

That if he loves, he should ere nightfall wed me.

ATALIDE.

Wed you! Good Heav'ns! You surely cannot mean it.

ROXANA.

I know 'tis not the custom of our sultans,
Who in their pride stoop not to such constraints,
Nor hold the laws of marriage made for them.
'Mid all the fair who vie for their caresses,
They sometimes deign to choose a favour'd mistress:
But, still a slave, with no security

But beauty's charms, she shares her master's couch,
And, without shaking off the servile yoke,
Must bear a son ere she be named sultana.
Like none before him, Amurath has will'd
This honour to bestow for love alone.
Mine is the title, mine the pow'r as well,
And in my hands his brother's life he left.
But in his ardour Amurath ne'er promised
Prospect of marriage, other gifts to crown:
And I, whose sole ambition was for this,
Have all his other benefits forgotten.
Yet what avails it to excuse my conduct?
'Tis Bajazet that from my memory wipes
The past; more happy, 'spite of his misfortunes,
Than Amurath, for he has learn'd to please me,
Perhaps without the wish; guards, women, vizier,
All have been bribed for him, and in my heart
He reigns supreme. Thanks to my love, right well
I use the pow'r his brother gave me o'er him.
His feet have all but reach'd the Sultan's throne,
There needs but one step more, for that I wait.
In spite of all my love, if he to-day
Refuses to be bound to me by marriage,
And dares to plead an odious privilege;
If he for me, who have done all for him,
Will not do all I ask, that very moment,
Regardless of my love and of my ruin,
I give him up, and let the wretch return
To that unhappy plight in which I found him.
This is the issue Bajazet must settle,
His weal or woe depends upon his answer.
I do not wish that you to-day should lend
Your voice to serve as my interpreter;
Nay, his own mouth and countenance before me
Shall all his heart reveal, and leave no shade
Of doubt; brought hither secretly, must he
All unprepared before mine eyes appear.
Farewell. This meeting o'er, you shall know all.

Scene 4.

ATALIDE, ZARA.

ATALIDE.

Zara, 'tis done, and Atalide is lost.

ZARA.

You?

ATALIDE.

I foresee already what must come.
The only hope I have lies in despair.

ZARA.

But why so, Madam?

ATALIDE.

Have you not just heard
The fatal purpose in Roxana's mind?
To what conditions she will bind him down?
The prince, she says, shall marry her or die.
If he submit, what will become of me?
What will become of him, if he refuse?

ZARA. .

I understand your grief. But, to be frank,
Your love should long ago have augur'd this.

ATALIDE.

Ah, Zara, is love ever dow'r'd with prudence?
All seem'd to fit so well with my desires;
Roxana, blindly on my word relying,
Believed the heart of Bajazet her own,
All that concern'd him to my care confided,
Spoke by my mouth, and saw him with mine eyes;
And close at hand I deem'd the happy moment
Which, thanks to her, should crown my lover's triumph.
Heav'n has pronounced against my cherish'd scheme.
What more, my Zara, should I then have done?

Ought I to have opposed Roxana's error,
And lost my lover, to enlighten her?
Ere in her heart that passion had been planted,
I loved him, well assured of being beloved.
E'en from our earliest years you will remember
How ties more tender reinforced the bond
Of kindred blood. Rear'd at his mother's lap
With him, I learn'd to favour Bajazet
Above his brother; she with joy approved
Our fondness, and, though parted when she died,
In absence still we held each other dear,
And nursed in silence a perennial passion.
Since then Roxana's eyes have seen the prince,
And, unsuspecting of my feelings, told
To me what love the sight of him inspired:
With eager joy she stretch'd her hand to help him.
As grateful as surprised, did Bajazet
Return her kindness. How could he do less?
But love too readily believes its wishes!
Roxana, with his courtesy contented,
Led us both on to feed ill-founded hopes,
And leave her to enjoy her sweet delusion.
I must, however, own my weakness, Zara;
A jealous feeling would not be suppress'd,
Roxana, loading him with benefits,
Opposed an empire to my feeble charms;
Her constant care forbade him to forget her,
She held before his eyes a dazzling prospect;
While I, what can I do for him? My heart
Utter'd itself in sighs, and sighs repeated;
Heav'n only knows how many tears I shed.
But Bajazet at last dispell'd my fears;
I wept no more, and, till to-day, have urged him
To act a part, and made myself his mouthpiece.
Alas! 'tis over now; Roxana, scorn'd,
Will soon be disabused of her mistake,
For Bajazet can hide the truth no longer;
I know his virtue quick to take alarm
At falsehood, and I ever gave his words
A sense too tender, trembling thus to use
Deceit, and now exposure means destruction.

Would that my rival's voice through mine might speak
 As erst! Or that at least I might have warn'd him
 What to expect! But Zara, I can wait
 His coming, and by word or look prepare him.
 Rather than perish let him marry her;
 For die he must, if so Roxana wills.
 Ay, he will rush on ruin!

Stay, poor fool;
 Your lover may be trusted, never fear
 That he will court destruction for your sake.
 It well may be that Bajazet's desire
 To save his life may e'en outrun your wishes.

ZARA.

Why let imaginary ills o'erwhelm you,
 And ever meet affliction ere it comes?
 You cannot doubt it, Bajazet adores you:
 Calm your emotion, or at least conceal it.
 Let not your tears betray the love between you.
 The hand that saved him will preserve him still,
 If but, encouraged in her self-delusion,
 Roxana never know she has a rival.
 Come, and elsewhere recover self-possession,
 Then learn the prosperous issue of their meeting.

ATALIDE.

Well, Zara, let us go.

And thou, just Heav'n,
 If punishment await misguided lovers,
 And this deception merit condemnation,
 On me, than he more guilty, vent thy wrath.

ACT II.

Scene 1

BAJAZET, ROXANA.

ROXANA.

At length, dear Prince, the fateful hour is come
That Heav'n has kept in store to grant you freedom.
No longer am I bound; this very day
Can I accomplish what my love has plann'd.
It is not mine t' assure an easy triumph,
Nor place a tranquil sceptre in your hands;
But all I can I do, as I have promised:
I arm your valour 'gainst your enemies,
And from your head remove a threatening danger;
Your own firm courage will achieve the rest.
Osman has seen the army, and their hearts
Are yours, and those who represent our law
Conspire with us, Achmet will answer for
Stamboul; and, as you know, I hold submissive
The officers, the eunuchs and the crowd
Of slaves, who guard the precincts of the palace;
Long have they bought my favour by their silence,
Their very lives are placed at my disposal.
Start now upon that grand career of glory
Which I have open'd to your high ambition.
The course that you will run involves no crime;
Thus only may you 'scape th' assassin's hand.
You will but follow an example set
By other sultans who have reign'd before you.
But for a fair beginning let us hasten
To seal at once your happiness and mine
Show to the world that in assisting you
To wield the sceptre I have served my husband:
Let marriage with a sacred bond unite us,
And justify the faith so freely giv'n.

BAJAZET.

Ah, Madam, what is this that you propose ?

ROXANA.

What secret hindrance mars our happiness ?

BAJAZET.

You needs must know the pride of royal state—
Spare me the pain of being more explicit.

ROXANA.

I know that ever since one of your sultans,
Proving the fury of a barbarous foe,
Beheld his wife bound to the victor's car,
And by all Asia dragg'd along in triumph,
Few who succeeded him have deign'd to take
The name of husband, jealous for their honour.
But love to such vain laws disowns obedience ;
And, not to quote more humble instances,
Great Solyman (than whom none of your sires, •
Whose conquering arms struck all the earth with dread,
Raised to so high a pitch the Turkish pow'r).
Casting on Roxelana eyes of love,
Forgot the pride that was his ruling passion,
And made her share alike his couch and throne,
Though to that rank she had no other claim
Than much adroitness and some little beauty.

BAJAZET.

'Tis true. But then compare his matchless might
With weakness like my own. Great Solyman
Held undisputed sway o'er land and sea.
Egypt reduced to yield complete submission ;
Rhodes, that strong rock of Ottoman dominion,
Where all her brave defenders found their grave ;
The Danube's savage banks forced to obey him ;
The bounds of Persian empire far withdrawn ;
The burning sands of Africa subdued ;
These hush'd all opposition to his will.

But what am I? Dependent on the people
And on the troops, indebted to misfortune
For all my fame. While doubtful yet of empire,
Proscribed and threaten'd, shall I those offend
To whom I sue? Will they believe our dangers
And troubles true, seeing us steep'd in pleasures?
Speak not to me of Solyman, but think
Rather of hapless Othman's recent murder.
The janizary chiefs, in their revolt
Seeking fair pretext for their bloody schemes,
Deem'd themselves authorised to take his life
For marrying as you would have me do.
The time may come when, in their hearts establish'd,
I may with safety dare to act more boldly.
We must not be too hasty; deign to place me
Firmly upon the throne, then will I show
My gratitude.

ROXANA.

I see my own imprudence,
And recognise your admirable foresight.
Not the least danger can escape your notice
To which my too impatient love might lead;
You fear to face dishonour thence resulting,
And since you tell me so I must believe it.
But have you thought, if marriage bind us not
Together, what worse perils you incur?
How, without me, your way is hedged around you,
And it behoves you most to win my favour?
That it is I who hold the palace gates,
Who can for you unlock them, or for ever
Shut them against you? That your life is mine;
That on my love your very breath depends;
And, had you lack'd this love which you reject,
That you would, in a word, be now no more?

BAJAZET.

Yes, I owe all to you. And I had reason
To think the only glory that you sought
Was to behold the triumph of my cause,
And hear me pay you my acknowledgment.

I feel the obligation and confess it,
Respectful homage ever shall confirm it.
The life that you have giv'n is at your service.
But would you still—

ROXANA.

Nay, I wish nothing more.
With forced excuses trouble me no longer;
I see how far your thoughts from mine are parted;
Ungrateful as you are, I will not urge
Compliance farther. To that abject state
Return, from which I saved you. What assurance
Is wanting yet of his indifference?
My ardour meets from him no warm response.
What place has love in all his calculations?
Ah, I can see your schemes. Do what I may,
You think I've risk'd too much to throw you over;
That I am bound to you by bands too strong
For me to part my interests from yours.
But sure am I your brother still is kind,
You know he loves me, and, despite his wrath,
I can appease him with a traitor's blood:
To justify myself your death suffices,
And I will see to it this very moment.

Yet hear me, Bajazet, I feel I love you:
You must not let me go. Why court destruction?
Still doth the way lie open to repentance.
Drive not a frenzied lover to despair.
If but one word escape me, you are lost.

BAJAZET.

'Tis in your hands, and you can take it from me;
It may be that my death, serving your wishes,
And winning Amurath's pardon, may restore you
The place that in his heart you held before.

ROXANA.

His heart, say you? E'en were it Amurath's wish,
And hope were lost of reigning in your own,
A sweet delusion long and fondly cherish'd,

Think you that I could entertain such thoughts,
Or live henceforth unless I live for you?
Lo, in your cruel hands myself have placed
Arms to destroy so weak a wretch as I;
Enjoy your triumph. All the proud disdain
That I assumed just now, I own it false;
• My only happiness on you depends,
• Your death will be the signal for my own.
Sad fruit of all my care to save your life!
At last I hear you sigh, and see you troubled:
Come, hide it not.

• BAJAZET.

Ah, would that I could speak!

ROXANA.

What is it that I hear? What say you, Sir?
Ha! you have secrets then I may not learn!
Your feelings are too sacred to be shown
To such as I!

BAJAZET.

• Madam, 'tis yours once more
To make your choice; open for me to empire
A lawful road, or slay me—I am ready.

• ROXANA.

This is too much! you shall be satisfied.
Ho, guards there, enter!

Scene 2.

BAJAZET, ROXANA, ACHMET.

ROXANA.

• Achmet, all is over;
You may return, for I have naught to tell you,
Save that I bow to Amurath's sov'reign sway.
Go. Let the palace gates henceforth be lock'd,
And all be order'd as it was aforetime.

Scene 3.

BAJAZET, ACHMET.

Prince, what is this I hear with strange surprise?
What will become of you, and what of me?
Whence comes this change? and whom am I to blame?
Good Heav'ns!

BAJAZET.

'Tis only right that you should know.
Roxana is offended,—burns for vengeance:
Our mutual compact is for ever broken.
Vizier, I warn you, to yourself take heed;
Act as seems best, and count no more on me.

ACHMET.

What?

BAJAZET.

You and yours, some place of refuge seek;
My friendship can afford you naught but peril;
I hoped one day to have repaid you better;
But must not think it more—the bubble's burst.

ACHMET.

What is this rock on which your hopes are wreck'd?
Just now I left all peaceful in the palace;
What is this madness that has seized your minds?

BAJAZET.

She wishes me to wed her, Achmet.

ACHMET.

Well,
'Tis true that wish accords not with the custom
That sultans use. But is that rule so strict
That you should lose your life to follow it?

What law more sacred than to save yourself?
To snatch from certain death the royal blood
Of Othman that in you alone survives?

BAJAZET.

Nay, the last drop would be too dearly purchased,
Were it to be preserved by cowardice.

ACHMET.

Why let your mind conceive so dark a picture?
Was Solyman's renown tarnish'd by marriage?
Yet Solyman himself was never menaced
By danger so apparent as yourself.

BAJAZET.

These very dangers make the chief disgrace
Of such a marriage, prompted by mere love
Of life. It was not so with Solyman:
His slave found favour in her master's eyes,
No dire necessity imposed its yoke,
But freely did he offer heart and hand.

ACHMET.

And yet you love her?

BAJAZET

Achmet, 'tis enough;
Less than you think I murmur at my fate.
Must I not deem dishonour worse than death,
Which in your steps I follow'd while a youth,
And learn'd to calmly face, when for no fault
I lay in prison. Amurath to my eyes
Has many a time the headsman's axe presented;
She will but end a life of ceaseless trouble.
Alas, and if with some regret I quit it—
Forgive me, Achmet; I have cause to pity
Hearts that with kind attachment, ill rewarded,
Made me the object of their every thought.

ACHMET.

You only are to blame, Prince, if we perish ;
Speak but a word, and you can save us all.
All the brave janizaries here remaining,
The holy ministers of our religion,
And those who, honour'd for their good example,
Direct the currents of the public favour,
Wait to conduct you to the sacred gate
Thro' which new sultans make their first appearance.

BAJAZET.

If then so dear they hold me, my brave Achmet,
Let them protect me from Roxana's pow'r,
Ay, and, if need be, break into the palace,
And with their valiant aid effect my rescue.
I would go forth cover'd with wounds and blood
Sooner than loaded with that odious name,
Her husband. In the tumult and confusion
Despair may arm me in my own defence ;
And, fighting boldly, I may give you time
To reach my side and prove your loyalty.

ACHMET.

The utmost expedition well might fail
To thwart Roxana's violent revenge
Then what would all such fiery zeal have done,
Save to involve your friends in fruitless guilt ?
Promise ; and, when no longer danger threatens,
'Tis yours to give your word what weight you will.

BAJAZET.

This to me, Achmet !

ACHMET.

Never blush : the sons
Of Othman are not bound to keep their oaths
Like common slaves. Take counsel of those heroes,
Who made their swords the measure of their rights
As of their faith, and march'd to victories
World-wide, State policy their only law ;

Half of this sacred empire rests on pledges
Lavishly given, sparingly fulfill'd.
Pardon my warmth.

BAJAZET.

Yes, I am well aware
How far they push'd the interest of the State;
But these same heroes freely spent their blood,
And scorn'd to purchase life by perfidy.

ACHMET.

O dauntless courage, but too firm and faithful!
Which wins my admiration, tho' it end
In ruin. Must a scruple then destroy—
But some good angel sends us Atalide.

Scene 4.

BAJAZET, ATALIDE, ACHMET.

ACHMET.

Ah, Madam! Come, unite your pray'rs with mine,
Or he is lost.

ATALIDE.

'Tis that which brings me here.
But leave us, Achmet. Bent on his destruction,
Roxana means to shut the palace gates.
In any case be within easy call,
There may be reason for a quick return.

Scene 5.

BAJAZET, ATALIDE.

BAJAZET.

Now is the moment come when I must leave you,
Heav'n has our common stratagem confounded,
No weapon can ward off its latest blow,
I should have died, or have resign'd your love.
Vainly have we contrived to mask our feelings,
And nothing gain'd but to defer my death.
I told you how 't would be, but to your wish
Consented, and postponed your grief as long
As might be. In return, fair Atalide,
Obey me now, avoid Roxana's presence,
Hide from her eyes the tears that would betray you,
And let us part; delay is dangerous.

ATALIDE.

No, Prince. Your kindness to a hapless maid
Has long enough resisted Fate's decrees.
Your wish to spare me costs you far too dear;
You must submit. Leave me, and mount the throne.

BAJAZET.

Leave you!

ATALIDE.

'Tis my desire and well consider'd.
True is it that a thousand jealous thoughts
Have surged within me, and I could not bear
That Bajazet should live, yet not be mine;
And often as I pictured to myself
The hateful triumph of my happy rival,
Your death appear'd (pardon a lover's frenzy)
Less fraught with anguish to my tortured heart.
But then there was not shown to my sad eyes
The fatal stroke ready to fall; I saw not,
As now I see, my Bajazet prepared
To bid his Atalide a last farewell.

I know, dear Prince, too well with what firm courage
You go to meet the dread approach of Death ;
How with your heart's last sighs you fain would prove
Your faithfulness to me ; but have compassion
Upon a soul more timid than your own ;
Temper your woes to Atalide's endurance,
Nor thus expose me to the liveliest sorrow
That ever dried the fount of lovers' eyes.

•

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BAJAZET.

And what will be your future, if to-day
You see me celebrate this fatal marriage ?

ATALIDE.

My future need be no concern to you,
I shall perhaps obey my destiny,
And find some flattering balm to ease my sorrow ;
Soothed with this thought e'en in the midst of tears,
You were resolved to lose your life for me,
And live, because I would not let you die.

•

•

BAJAZET.

No, you will never see that cruel sight.
The more you bid me be untrue to you,
The more I see how truly you deserve
To fail in gaining that which you desire.
What! Shall this tender love, that in our childhood
Was born, and grew in silence with our growth ;
Your tears that only I could wipe away ;
My frequent oaths that I would ne'er forsake you ;
Shall all these end in basest perfidy ?
And whom would'st have me marry ? I will tell you,
A slave who thinks of no one but herself,
Who shows me instruments of death made ready,
And offers me her hand,—or execution :
Whilst Atalide, touch'd by my present dangers,
And worthy of the sires from whom she springs,
Would sacrifice herself, her love, and all.
Ah! Let the jealous Sultan have my head,
Its ransom were too costly.

ATALIDE.

Generous Prince,
You yet may live without betraying me.

BAJAZET.

Speak. If I can, I'm willing to obey you.

ATALIDE.

Roxana loves you, and, despite her wrath,
If you, my lord, would take more pains to please her,
Letting your amorous sighs instil the hope
Of one day—

BAJAZET.

Say no more: I can't consent.
You must not fancy cowardly despair
Has made me so faint-hearted that I dread
The cares of royal pow'r that might be mine,
And would avoid them by untimely death.
Rash counsels are to me but too congenial:
The glories of my race, my soul possessing
And making ease repugnant, kindled hopes
Of being number'd with that line of heroes.
But tho' ambition fiercely burns within me,
I cannot longer dupe a lover's trust.
Vain would it be for me to promise it,
My lips and eyes, foes to such craven falsehood,
When I might be most anxious to beguile her,
Would all the tumult of my mind betray;
With anger she would see my sighs were forced
From an unwilling breast, as cold as ice
To her. Heav'n knows how oft I had disclosed
The truth, were mine own life alone at stake,
And no fear present that her jealousy
Might but too easily extend to you!
And shall I promise what my heart belies,
Acting the perjured villain to abuse—
Ah! if your judgment were not warp'd by love,
Far from enjoining this base subterfuge,
You would be surely first to blush thereat.

But lest you press me further to forget
The claims of honour, I will find Roxana,
And leave you, Madam.

ATALIDE.

Nay, I quit you not :
Come, cruel Prince, I will conduct you thither,
And tell our secret to her ears, myself.
Since my distracted lover scorns my tears,
And fain would die before my very eyes,
Roxana shall at least in death unite us ;
My blood will better quench her rage than yours,
And to your startled eyes will I present
The rueful sight you would prepare for me.

BAJAZET.

Heav'ns! What is this?

ATALIDE.

Can you imagine, Sir,
You hold your honour dearer than is mine
To me? Believe me, while I made you speak,
My shame a hundred times all but compell'd
Disclosure, but I saw your death too nigh.
Why, since my own must follow, why refuse
To do for me what I dared do for you?
One word a little kinder may suffice :
Perchance Roxana in her heart forgives you.
She grants you, as you see, time for repentance ;
Nor did she, quitting you, despatch the vizier,
Nor send her guards to seize you in my presence :
Her tears have shown me how her tender feelings
With rage contend, imploring me to aid her.
She waits to catch at hope, however faint,
To drop the arms of vengeance from her hand.
Go to her, Prince, and save your life and mine.

BAJAZET.

Well, be it so—but how shall I accost her?

ATALIDE.

Nay, ask not me to choose befitting words,

Heav'n will supply them as occasion serves.
Go: I must not be present at your meeting,
Your eyes or mine would tell what trouble ails us.
Go: once again, I dare not be a witness.
Say—all that may be needful, Sir, to save you.

ACT III.

Scene 1.

ATALIDE, ZARA.

ATALIDE.

Is't true then, Zara? Is his pardon seal'd?

ZARA.

Madam, as I have said, a slave, who ran
With eager steps to do Roxana's pleasure,
Admitted Achmet at the palace gates:
To me they spoke not; but the vizier's joy
Mark'd on his face better than any words
That 'tis a happy change recalls him hither,
And that he comes to sign a lasting peace.
No doubt Roxana leans to milder measures.

ATALIDE.

Thus pleasure on all sides eludes my grasp,
And, leaving me forsaken, follows them.
Zara, I've done my duty, nor repent it.

ZARA.

Why, Madam, what new trouble now alarms you?

ATALIDE.

Have you not heard, my Zara, by what charm,
Or rather should I say by what a compact,

The prince has brought about a change so sudden ?
Roxana's fury seem'd inflexible ;
Has she some pledge that vouches for his heart ?
Speak. Does he wed her ?

ZARA.

I know naught of that.
But if he thus alone could save himself,
And acts as you yourself have bidden him,
If, in a word, he weds her—

ATALIDE.

Weds her, Zara !

ZARA.

What ! Do you then regret those generous words
Which your unselfish care for him dictated ?

ATALIDE.

No, no. It is but right that he should do it.
Too jealous feelings, hush your clamorous voice !
Wedding Roxana, Bajazet obeys me.
Respect the better nature that has quell'd you,
Nor with its noble counsels mingle yours ;
Paint not my prince clasp'd in another's arms,
But let me picture him without regret
Set on the throne my love has made him mount.
I am myself again, and firm as ever.
It was his love, dear Zara, that I wish'd,
He loves me ; and this hope at least consoles me,
That worthy of my lover I shall die.

ZARA.

Die ! What inspires so terrible a purpose ?

ATALIDE.

I have resign'd my lover ; does the rest
Surprise you ? Can a death that ends these tears
Be counted in the number of my woes ?

Enough for me that Bajazet shall live ;
 I wish'd it, wish it still, cost what it may :
 Be 't joy or grief I care not to inquire,
 I love him well enough to give him up.
 But he must know that, if I can for him
 Make sacrifice so great, tending his life
 With anxious effort, yet I love too well
 To wish to be the witness of his bridal.
 Let us go learn—

ZARA.

Pray calm yourself, dear Madam.
 The vizier comes to bring you news of all.

Scene 2.

ATALIDE, ACHMET, ZARA.

ACHMET.

At last our lovers have been reconciled,
 And a fair breeze now wafts us into port.
 The wrath of the Sultana is disarm'd ;
 She has declared to me her latest wishes ;
 And while the dreadful standard of the Prophet
 She to the city's startled sight displays,
 And Bajazet prepares my steps to follow,
 My task is to explain to all the people
 What means this signal, rouse a just alarm,
 And the new Sultan publicly proclaim.

Meanwhile permit me to remind you, Madam,
 What guerdon has been promised to my zeal.
 Do not expect from me such rapturous sighs
 As I have witness'd in those ardent lovers :
 But if respect more worthy of my years,
 The careful homage of a heart devoted
 To one so near in blood to royalty,
 Can—

ATALIDE.

Time may teach me what your merits claim.

And you in time may also learn to know me.
But tell me now what transports did you witness?

ACHMET.

Can you not fancy, Madam, the soft sighs
Of two young lovers mutually enamour'd?

ATALIDE.

Nay, 'tis a marvel fills me with surprise.
What price exacts Roxana for this pardon?
Does he consent to wed her?

ACHMET.

Yes, I think so.

I'll tell you all I saw with mine own eyes.

'Twas with amazement at their angry quarrel,

Exclaiming against lovers, love, and fortune,

Ay, and in blank despair I left this palace.

Lading a vessel ready in the harbour

With treasure rescued from my ruin'd fortunes,

I thought to sail to some far distant land,

When, full of this sad purpose, I was summon'd

Hither once more. Hope to my feet gave wings,

And at my voice the palace doors flew open.

A female slave my joyful eyes beheld,

Who, all in silence, led me to a chamber

Where with attentive ear Roxana hearken'd

To Bajazet, while all around was stillness;

Resisting my impatience, and respecting

Their secret conference, I stood aloof,

And, motionless, long watch'd what pass'd between them.

At last, with eyes that all her soul betray'd,

The pressure of her hand pledged her affection,

And he, with eloquent and amorous gaze,

Assured her of his passion in his turn.

ATALIDE.

Alas!

ACHMET.

Then both of them perceived my presence:

"Here," said she, "see your sovereign, yours and mine:

Now to your hands, brave Achmet, I consign him.
 Go, and for him make ready regal pomp,
 Let loyal crowds await him in the mosque;
 Soon shall the palace set you the example."
 Then at the feet of Bajazet I fell,
 And straightway from their presence disappear'd,
 Only too happy, on my way, to bring you
 True tidings of their reconciliation,
 And offer you my most respectful homage.
 I go to speed my task,—his coronation.

Scene 3.

ATALIDE, ZARA.

ATALIDE.

Let us withdraw, and not disturb their joy.

ZARA.

Madam, believe—

ATALIDE.

Why flatter me with falsehoods?
 How can I face a sight so terrible!
 Fain would they wed forthwith; my fate is settled,
 For welcome to Roxana is the love
 He vows. But why complain? 'Twas I that wish'd it.
 And yet would you have thought this possible,
 When no self-sacrifice seem'd great enough
 To prove his faith to me, and he refused
 The least concession to Roxana's wishes;
 When with a secret pleasure I perceived
 How all my tears were powerless to move him?
 Would you have deem'd his heart, that seem'd so constant,
 Could e'er have found such eloquence to woo her?
 Ah! but too ready may that heart have been
 To echo all his lips have learn'd to utter!
 Perchance new graces in her eyes appear'd,
 Responsive to more tender looks from him.
 She will have touch'd him with her tale of woe;

In generous hearts such love breeds sympathy,
Nor least when tears can purchase pow'r supreme.
Alas! What reasons urge him to forget me!

ZARA.

But, Madam, their success is still uncertain.
Be patient.

ATALIDE.

No. What boots it to be blind?
I have no wish to swell my tide of trouble;
I know where lies for him the path of safety,
And when my tears recall'd him to Roxana,
I did not mean that he should disobey me.
But, with his fond farewell still in mine ears,
After such tender transports of affliction,
His joy, methinks, need not have been express'd
With such conspicuous warmth as Achmet witness'd.
Judge for yourself if I have cause to murmur.
Why am I only banish'd from their counsels?
Am I concerned so little in the fate
Of Bajazet? Why lingers he so long
Away from me? Does not his heart reproach him.
That thus he shrinks from meeting Atalide?
But I will spare him this uneasiness,
He ne'er shall see me more.

ZARA.

Madam, he comes.

Scene 4.

BAJAZET, ATALIDE, ZARA.

BAJAZET.

Your bidding has been done; and I have spoken.
My life no longer, Madam, is in danger;
And happy should I be if truth and honour
Réproach'd me not for having purchased safety

By means unjust ; if mine own heart could pardon
 My fault as readily as does Roxana.
 But I at last am free, my hand is arm'd,
 And I may now meet my unnatural brother,
 No more, dependent on your skill, contriving
 Secret intrigues, here plotting to seduce
 His mistress' heart, but following him afar
 To other climes, more nobly in fair fight
 Disputing the affections of his people,
 And making fame for valour judge between us.
 But why is this ? I see you weeping !

ATALIDE.

No, Sir ;

I do not grudge you your new happiness :
 Heav'n's justice owed you this strange turn of fortune.
 You know if e'er your welfare I opposed ;
 Your eyes are witnesses how all my life
 Your perils have engross'd my every care ;
 And, since my death alone can seal your safety,
 It is without regret for you I die.
 True is it that, had Heav'n vouchsafed to hear
 My pray'rs, I might have made a happier end ;
 My rival would no less have been your bride,
 And found you faithful to the marriage tie ;
 But, though her husband, you would have withheld
 Those tokens of true love so freely lavish'd.
 Less fervour would have satisfied Roxana,
 And I, in dying, this sweet thought have cherish'd,
 That, only yielding to my strict injunction,
 You gave your hand to her, your heart to me,
 Still, still mine own e'en in the world of shades ;
 That I was leaving you, but not your love.

BAJAZET.

Why talk you thus, Madam, of love and marriage ?
 What, in the name of Heav'n, affords you ground
 For speech like this ? What falsehood has deceived you ?
 I love Roxana ! I devote my life
 To her ! Ah, no ; and, far from thinking so,

Can you believe my tongue could even say it ?
But, as it happen'd, there was need of neither :
Roxana was as credulous as ever ;
And whether she at once thought my return
A certain token of my true affection,
Or time too precious for prolong'd resistance,
Scarce had I said a few unheeded words,
When with a flood of tears she cut me short,
And, placing in my hands her life and fortune,
Without reserve trusting my gratitude,
Seem'd satisfied that I intended marriage.
I, blushing to impose upon her faith,
Unworthy of a love so generous,
Show'd my confusion, but she fondly deem'd it
Due to the warmth of passion, while I felt
That I was basely cruel and unjust.
Believe me, I had need that trying moment
To call to mind all my concern for you,
In order to preserve perfidious silence
Unbroken to the end. Now, when I come
After such conflicts seeking consolation
Against remorse, I find you in displeasure,
Charging my harass'd conscience with your death.
Alas ! I see too well e'en at this moment
All that I say has little force to move you.

Madam, 'twere well to end what pains us both ;
Why should we vainly vex each other longer ?
Roxana is not far to seek ; permit me
To tell the truth, more gladly will I go
To disabuse her, than I went so often,
Forcing myself to play the hypocrite.
Ah ! here she comes.

ATALIDE.

Heav'n save him from his rashness !
Prince, if you love me, do not undeceive her.

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Scene 5.

ROXANA, BAJAZET, ATALIDE, ZARA.

ROXANA.

Come, Bajazet, 'tis time to show yourself,
That all the Court may recognize its master :
All that these walls contain, many in number,
Gather'd by my command, await my wishes.
My slaves (the rest will follow where they lead),
Are the first subjects that my love allots you.
'This sudden change from wrath to milder mood
May well surprise you, Madam. For, but now,
Determined to take vengeance on a traitor,
I swore he should not see another day,
Yet almost ere he spoke my heart relented ;
'Twas love imposed that oath, and love revokes it.
Reading deep passion in his wild distraction,
His pardon I pronounced, and trust his promise.

BAJAZET.

Yes, I have promised, and my word is pledged
Ne'er to forget all that to you I owe :
Have I not sworn that constant care and kindness
Shall duly pay my debt of gratitude ?
If on these terms your favour I may claim,
I go to wait the harvest of your bounty.

Scene 6.

ROXANA, ATALIDE, ZARA.

ROXANA.

Heav'ns ! What amazement strikes me at this moment !
Is it a dream ? and have mine eyes deceived me ?
What mean these frigid words, this sombre greeting,
Which seems to cancel all that pass'd between us ?
What hope does he imagine mine, for which

I banish'd my resentment, and restored him
To favour? He, methought, swore that his heart
Would own me mistress to his dying day.
Does he repent already of the peace
That we had sign'd? Was I just now deluded?
But was he not conversing with you, Madam?
What did he say?

ATALIDE.

To me? He loves you always.

ROXANA.

His life at least depends on my belief
That it is so. But tell me, pray, when joy
Should triumph, how you can explain the gloom
That settled on his features as he left me?

ATALIDE.

Madam, I saw no cloud upon his brow.
Oft has he told me of your gracious kindness,
And he just now was full of it: at parting
He seem'd to me the same as when he enter'd.
But, be that as it may, need it surprise you
That on the eve of such important issues
He should be troubled and some signs escape him
Of anxious thoughts that on his mind intrude?

ROXANA.

Such plausible excuses do you credit
For skill that pleads on his behalf more fairly
Than he could do himself.

ATALIDE.

What other cause—

ROXANA.

Enough! I read your motive, Madam, better
Than you suppose. Leave me, for I would be
Alone a little while. I too am troubled,
And anxious cares are mine as well as his,
To which I owe a moment's thought, in secret.

Scene 7.

R O X A N A.

How must I construe all that I have seen?
Are they in league together to deceive me?
Wherefore this change, those words, that quick departure?
Did I not catch a glance that pass'd between them?
Were they not both struck with embarrassment?
Ah! why has Heav'n doom'd me to this affront?
Is this the fruit of all my blind affection?
So many painful days and sleepless nights,
Plots and intrigues, treason too deep for pardon!
And shall they all turn to a rival's profit?

But yet, too ready to torment myself,
I may too closely scan a passing cloud,
And take for passion what is mere caprice.
Surely he would have carried to the end
His wiles; and, in full prospect of success,
He could have feign'd at least a moment longer.
Love, uncontroll'd by reason, quakes at shadows;
Let me take courage. Why should Atalide
Be dreaded as my rival? What has he
To thank her for? To which of us to-day
Owes he the sceptre?

But too well I know
Love is a tyrant; and, if other charms
Attract, what matter crowns or life itself?
Can benefits outweigh the heart's attachment?
I need but search mine own. Did gratitude
Constrain me to his brother, when this wretch
Bewitch'd me? Ah! if other tie were absent,
Would the idea of marriage so alarm him?
He gladly would have seconded my wishes,
And not have braved destruction by refusal.
Just cause—

But someone comes to speak with me.
What can she want?

Scene 8.

ROXANA, FATIMA.

FATIMA.

Forgive me this intrusion :
But there is come a courier from the army ;
And, though the seaward gate was shut, the guards,
On bended knees, without delay unlock'd it
To orders from the Sultan, to yourself
Address'd ; and, strange to say, 'tis Orcan brings them.

ROXANA.

Orcan !

FATIMA.

Yes, he ; of all the Sultan's slaves
The one most trusted for his faithful service,
Blackest of those whom Afric's sun has scorch'd.
Madam, he asks impatiently for you ;
I thought it best to give you timely notice,
And, lest you should be taken by surprise,
I have detain'd him in your own apartments.

ROXANA.

What new disaster comes to overwhelm me ?
What can his bidding be ? What my reply ?
Doubtless the Sultan, in his mind perturb'd,
Has Bajazet condemn'd a second time.
Without my sanction none will dare to take
His life ; for all obey me here. But ought I
To shield him ? Bajazet or Amurath,
Which claims allegiance ? One have I betray'd ;
The other may be false to me. Time presses ;
I must resolve this fatal doubt, nor let
The precious moments pass. Love, when most cautious,
Cannot conceal its secret inclination.
I will watch Bajazet and Atalide :
Then crown the lover, or destroy the traitor.

ACT IV.

Scene 1.

ATALIDE, ZARA.

ATALIDE.

Ah, know you my alarm? How in this palace
Fierce Orcan's odious features I have seen?
I fear his presence at this fatal moment—
But tell me, have you seen prince Bajazet?
What said he? Will he hear the voice of reason,
And, going to Roxana, calm suspicion?

ZARA.

He may not go again without permission.
Such are her orders; she will have him wait.
No doubt she would not wish that slave to see him.
On finding him I feign'd I had not sought him,
Gave him your letter, and received his answer.
Here, Madam, read what tidings it conveys.

ATALIDE reads.

*"Why should thy love bid me accustom'd grown
To labyrinths of deceit, still wander there?
Yet shall my life be cherish'd with due care,
Since thou hast sworn thereon depends thine own.*

*Y s, I will see Roxana, and will say
Words to appease her anger, if I may,
Swearing how grateful I will ever be.
Exact no more. For neither death nor thou
False promises of love shall make me vow,
When in my heart I cherish only thee."*

What need of protestations? Does he think
I know not how devotedly he loves me?
Is this the way in which he meets my wishes?

Roxana, and not I, must be persuaded.
How I am fill'd with anxious fears again !
Why did I heed distrustful jealousy
Reproaching me with blindness? Why give voice
To doubts that all his tales were tinged with falsehood ?
Did not my happiness pass expectation ?
I was beloved, Roxana well contented.
Return, and, if you can, see Bajazet
Once more. His frigid words will ne'er appease her ;
Let eyes and lips alike swear that he loves her,
And force her to believe him. Oh, that I
Might quicken his indifference with my tears,
And with the love I feel inspire his tongue !
But to new perils I should thus expose him.

ZARA.

See, the Sultana comes.

ATALIDE.

Ah, hide that letter.

Scene 2.

ROXANA, ATALIDE, FATIMA, ZARA.

ROXANA (to FATIMA).

This order has been sent me. I must use it
To fright her.

ATALIDE (to ZARA).

Run, try all means to persuade him

Scene 3.

ROXANA, ATALIDE, FATIMA.

ROXANA.

I have received a message from the army.
Madam, have you been told what there has happen'd?

ATALIDE.

I heard a slave came hither from the camp,
But naught I know of anything besides.

ROXANA.

A change of fortune has to Amurath
Brought victory, and Babylon has fallen.

ATALIDE.

What, Madam! Osman then—

ROXANA.

Was ill inform'd;
Since his departure was this slave despatch'd.
The war is over.

ATALIDE.

Fatal news!

ROXANA.

And now,
To crown disgrace, the Sultan follows close
After his messenger.

ATALIDE.

The Persian hosts
Bar not his progress?

ROXANA.

No. He marches hither
With rapid strides.

ATALIDE.

I pity your alarm !
What you would do must now be quickly finish'd.

ROXANA.

Too late the tide of conquest to oppose !

ATALIDE.

Ah !.

ROXANA.

Time abates not his severity.
See, in my hand I hold his last commands.

ATALIDE.

And what are they ?

ROXANA.

Look : read them for yourself.
Madam, you know the writing and the seal.

ATALIDE.

I recognize the cruel Sultan's hand.

(She reads.)

*" While Babylon still scorn'd to own my sway,
To you express commandment did I send ;
Which doubtless you were careful to obey,
And Bajazet ere this has met his end.*

*Now when proud Babylon my yoke must bear,
That order I confirm, if need there be,
Hold you your own life precious ? Take good care
That, when I come, his sever'd head I see."*

ROXANA.

Well, Madam ?

ATALIDE (aside).

Hide your tears, poor Atalide.

ROXANA.

What think you ?

ATALIDE.

Still he seeks his brother's life
But he believes him helpless and alone.
He knows not of your love that shelters him,
That you and Bajazet are one in soul,
That you would rather die—

ROXANA.

For my part, Madam,
I fain would save the prince ; I cannot hate him ;
But—

ATALIDE.

What have you decided ?

ROXANA.

To obey.

ATALIDE.

Obey ?

ROXANA.

What choice is left at such a crisis ?
I must.

ATALIDE.

And will you then cut short that life,
Which with fond vows to you the prince devoted ?

ROXANA.

I must. My order is already given.

ATALIDE.

Oh ! I am dying.

FATIMA.

See, she falls, and seems
Lifeless

ROXANA.

Go, take her to the nearest chamber ;
Watch every look, and listen to each word,
All that may proof afford of perfidy.

Scene 4.

• ROXANA.

My rival has at last declared herself.
On what a broken reed have I relied !
Six months have I been thinking all her care
Devoted day and night to aid my love ;
While all that time, it seems, mine eyes have watch'd
With zealous service to promote her own,
Devising means whereby she might obtain
Many a sweet and secret interview ;
And, e'en anticipating her desire,
Oft have I hasten'd those delightful moments.
This is not all : now must I get to know
How far her perfidy has been successful,
And must—But what more is there left to learn ?
Is not my woe writ on her countenance ?
Cannot I read beneath this wild distress
Assurance that her lover's heart is hers ?
Free from suspicious doubts that harass me,
The fear she feels is only for his life.
No matter : I will learn the truth. She may
Be trusting, like myself, false promises.
I'll lay a trap to catch him unawares.
But is not this a task vain and unworthy ?
Devising means but to torment myself,
Why should I rend the veil that hides his scorn ?
And, after all, his caution may outwit
My utmost skill. Besides time presses closely,
I must take action and without delay.
'Twere better if I shut mine eyes to all
That I have seen, nor probed the galling wound
I'll try how far he'll go and dare the worst,

See whether, when I've set him on the throne,
He will betray the love that saved his life,
And, with a dastard's liberality,
Share with my rival all he owes to me.
Shall I not always have it in my pow'r
To punish both at need? Yes, I will watch
The traitor, till my righteous fury finds
Fit season to surprise the amorous pair;
Then the same dagger shall in death unite them;
Both will I stab, and after them myself.
This is the proper part for me to play.
I will seem blind to all.

Scene 5.

ROXANA, FATIMA.

ROXANA.

What have you learn'd?
Is Bajazet indeed in love with her?
And do her words reveal their mutual flame?

FATIMA.

She has not spoken. For her swoon continues,
And only long-drawn sighs and feeble moans
Betoken that she lives, while ev'ry moment
Her breath seems ready to depart for ever.
Your ladies, emulous to give relief,
Removed the kerchief from her panting bosom;
In mine own eagerness to aid their efforts,
I found this letter in its folds conceal'd,
Whereon I recognized your lover's writing,
And thought it best to bring it straight to you.

ROXANA.

Give it—Why throbs my heart, what sudden shock
Freezes my sense, arrests my trembling hand?
He may have written nothing to offend

My jealousy, he may—See, let me read it—

*..... Neither death nor thou
False promises of love shall make me vow,
When in my heart I cherish only thee.*

Ha! Have I then found the base treason out!
I see the bait with which they thought to catch me.
This then is his return for all my love,
Mean wretch, unworthy of the life I left him!
Now I can breathe once more; what joy to know
The traitor has for once betray'd himself!
Free from the pressure of tormenting fears,
My rage can calmly study its revenge.
Ay, let the monster die! Let him be seized,
Go, bid my mutes prepare his punishment,
And to his neck apply the fatal bowstring
That ends the heinous guilt of such as he.
Run, Fatima; be prompt to serve my wrath.

FATIMA.

Ah, Madam!

ROXANA.

Well, what is it?

FATIMA.

May I venture
Without displeasing you, so justly wroth,
To ask indulgence for a timid voice?
'Tis true that Bajazet, of life unworthy,
Deserves to suffer at their cruel hands;
But, ingrate as he is, 'tis Amurath
Rather than he that should engage your fears
To-day. Who knows but that some faithless tongue
Already may have warn'd him of your plot?
And hearts like his, as you must know full well,
When once offended know not how to pardon;
At such a moment the swift stroke of death
Becomes the dearest token of their love.

ROXANA.

Ah, with what cruelty and insolence

They both made sport of my credulity!
How readily, how gladly did I trust them!
'Twas no great victory the traitor gain'd
When he deceived a heart prepared to love him;
Which fear'd the thought so much, it would not dream
Of falsehood! From my proud estate I stoop'd,
And sought you first when in the lowest depths
Of misery, to change a life disturb'd
By constant dangers into one of peace
And pow'r. But, after all my care and kindness,
You vow that you can never say you love me.

But why with vanish'd dreams let memory stray?
You weep, poor fool! Those tears, now shed too late,
Were needed rather when a vain desire
Bred the first fatal thought of seeing him.
You weep! and he, still bent on treachery,
Thinks how he may ensnare you with his words
And keep his life unharm'd to please your rival.
The wretch shall die!—

What! Fatima still here!

Begone. But I myself must hasten hence:
Like an avenging spirit let him see me,
Showing at once his brother's fatal sentence
And this indisputable proof of treason.
You, Fatima, must keep my rival here;
And in his dying ear her cries shall sound
A last farewell. Let her be well attended;
My hatred needs her life, guard it with care.
If apprehension of her lover's death
So touch'd her heart that almost she expired,
What surfeit of revenge, what strange delight,
To show him soon, a pallid corpse, before her!
Then will her eyes, while on that sight they gaze,
Repay me for the pleasures I have lent them.
Go, guard her safely, above all keep silence.
I—But who comes to make my vengeance linger?

Scene 6.

ROXANA, ACHMET, OSMAN.

ACHMET.

What mean you, Madam, by this long delay,
Wasting these precious moments? It has been
My care to gather all Stamboul together,
Whose leaders are assail'd by anxious questions;
They all with my adherents wait the signal
You promised me, this movement to explain.
How comes it that, neglecting their impatience,
The palace keeps meanwhile a gloomy silence?
Madam, declare yourself, postpone no longer—

ROXANA.

You shall be satisfied, it shall be done.

ACHMET.

There's something in your look and voice severe
That seems to contradict such an assurance.
Does then your love, all obstacles o'ercome—

ROXANA.

The traitor Bajazet has lived too long.

ACHMET.

He, traitor!

ROXANA.

Ay, alike to me and you.
We were his dupes.

ACHMET.

How so?

ROXANA.

That Atalide,
Whose hand was a reward of little worth
For all that you have dared on his behalf—

ACHMET.

Well?

ROXANA.

Read; and, after such an insult, judge
If we should yet defend so foul a traitor.
'Twere better far to face the just resentment
Of Amurath, who comes with laurels crown'd,
(Leaving a base accomplice to his fate),
And soothe the Sultan by a prompt submission.

ACHMET (*giving her back the letter*).

Yes; since the wretch dares to insult me thus,
I will myself most willingly avenge you.
Leave it to me from both of us to clear
The stain with which his life has cover'd ours.
Show me the road, and I will run.

ROXANA.

Nay, Achmet;
Be mine the pleasure of confounding him,
To see his terror, and enjoy his shame:
Revenge would lose its sweetness if too swift.
I go to make all ready. You, meanwhile,
Disperse at once the crowds that have assembled.

Scene 7.

ACHMET. OSMAN.

ACHMET.

Stay. 'Tis not time to go away just yet.

OSMAN.

What! Has your love bereft you of your judgment?
Desire of vengeance carries you too far.
Will you be witness of the prince's death?

ACHMET.

What mean you? Are you then so credulous
As to suspect me of such foolish anger?
You think me jealous? Would to Heav'n that he
Had by his falsehood injured only me!

OSMAN.

Why then, instead of pleading for the prince,—

ACHMET.

Is the Sultan in a state to hear me?
Did you not see, when I proposed to find him,
I meant to share with him success or ruin?
Unlucky issue of this tangled plot!
Infatuated prince! or rather I,
Loaded with years and honours, to have placed
The labyrinthian clue in hands so young,
And left my own frail and uncertain fortune
To follow where these thoughtless lovers led!

OSMAN.

Leave her to wreak her wrath on Bajazet:
If he will perish, think of your own safety.
Who can reveal your secret schemes, my lord,
But friends who may be trusted to keep silence?
The prince's death will pacify the Sultan.

ACHMET.

So in her madness may Roxana fancy,
But I have keener eyes; experience
Of many years has taught me how a monarch
Both thinks and acts. Three sultans have I served,
And seen my fellows drop like falling leaves:
Boldness is better than servility
To win and keep the favour of the great,
As I have proved full oft. The cringing slave
Must die when he incurs his master's wrath.

OSMAN.

Fly, then.

ACHMET.

Just now that seem'd the safest course,
But then my plot had not advanced so far ;
Retreat is harder now than to press on.
The lightning's brilliant flash must mark my fall,
Leaving behind me wreck and desolation
Which may retard my enemies' pursuit.
Why be dumfounded ? Bajazet still lives ;
Have I not brought him out of sorer straits ?
Come, let us save him, in his own despite,
For us, our friends, ay, even for Roxana.
Did you not see how, eager to protect him,
She stay'd my arm too ready to avenge her ?
Little know I of love, but I am sure
His shame is what she longs for, not his life.
We yet have time. Roxana, tho' despairing,
Still loves him, Osman, and is gone to see him.

OSMAN.

What has inspired in you such dauntless daring ?
We tarry here but at Roxana's pleasure.
Is not this palace full—

ACHMET.

Of abject slaves,
Untrain'd to arms, shelter'd within these walls
From birth. But you, whose valour Amurath
Forgets to honour, link'd by common grievance,
Will you support me to the bitter end ?

OSMAN.

To doubt it is to wrong me. If you die,
I will die too.

ACHMET.

A bold and well arm'd troop
Of friends await us at the palace gates ;
Roxana thinks the words I spoke sincere ;
Brought up within the palace, well I know
Its windings, and where Bajazet is lodged.

Let us proceed, and, if I needs must die,
Then let us perish, Osman, as becomes
A vizier such as I am and his friend.

ACT V.

Scene 1.

ATALIDE.

Alas ! mine eyes search every spot in vain.
Unhappy that I am ! How have I lost him ?
Why did kind Heav'n allow my fatal love
To hang such perils o'er his head to-day ;
And, worst of all, that this disastrous letter
Should reach my rival's eyes ? Yes, it was here
Roxana found me, and my timid hand
Conceal'd the dangerous missive in my bosom,
While, taken by surprise, I check'd my tears.
Then, as with threatening voice she bade me know
The Sultan's order, all my senses left me.
When I recover'd, round me stood her ladies,
Who now have vanish'd from my wondering eyes.
Ah, cruel were the hands that succour'd me ;
Their help was purchased at too dear a price,
For they convey'd this letter to Roxana.
What horrid purpose now her mind engrosses ?
Who will be first the victim of her vengeance ?
What blood will satisfy her keen resentment ?
Ah ! Bajazet is dead, or dies this moment,
And I meanwhile am kept a prisoner here.
But the door opens. I shall learn his fate.

Scene 2.

ROXANA, ATALIDE, FATIMA, GUARDS.

ROXANA (*to ATALIDE*).

Withdraw!

ATALIDE.

Forgive the feelings which o'ercome me—

ROXANA.

Withdraw, I tell you; answer not a word!
Guards, keep her close.

Scene 3.

ROXANA, FATIMA.

ROXANA.

Yes, Fatima, all's ready.
Black Orcan and the mutes await their victim.
Yet still, like hound at leash, I hold his fate
Restrain'd; but once let loose it slays its quarry.
Say, is he coming?

FATIMA.

Close upon my footsteps
A slave conducts him. Unsuspicious seems he
Of imminent disgrace, for eagerly
To seek you, Madam, did he leave his chamber.

ROXANA.

Poor feeble soul, courting thine own deception,
Canst thou again suffer the traitor's presence?
Dost think that words of thine, by love or fear,
May move him? E'en should he submit, canst thou
Forgive? Should vengeance linger any longer?

Have not his wrongs yet overflow'd thy cup?
Waste no more efforts on a heart of stone,
But let the caitiff perish—Ha! he comes.

Scene 4.

BAJAZET, ROXANA

ROXANA.

I will not weary you with vain reproaches;
The moments are too precious to be wasted
In words, and I should say but what you know;
Your very life bears witness to my care
For you. And if my love meets no response,
I murmur not thereat, tho', sooth to say,
This love of mine, perchance, and all my kindness
Might well add something to my feeble charms:
But when in place of gratitude I find
That you have met such love and confidence
With feign'd affection and prolong'd deceit,
Your baseness fills me with astonishment.

BAJAZET.

Mine, Madam?

ROXANA.

Yours, I say! Will you not still
Disown the scorn you fancy undetected?
Why should you not continue to disguise
With hues of falsehood love that is another's,
And swear to me with that perfidious tongue
All that you feel for her—your Atalide?

BAJAZET.

For Atalide! Good Heav'ns! Who then has told you—

ROXANA.

Stop, traitor, look, and then deny you wrote it!

BAJAZET (*after looking at the letter*). .

I say no more: this letter's frank avowal
Contains the revelation of a love
Cross'd by disaster; now you know a secret
Ready to leap to light, and all but own'd
A thousand times already. Yes, I love,
And ere your flame had shown itself to blast
My hopes, this passion, form'd in infancy,
Had steel'd my heart against all other charms.
If I may dare to tell you so, your love
Thought that by lavish kindness it might win me,
And your own heart interpreted my feelings.
I knew your error; but what could I do?
I saw 'twas one you would be loath to part with.
Oft have ambitious hearts like mine been tempted
By offers of a throne: the gift allured me.
I hesitated not, but gladly seized
The opportunity of gaining freedom;
And all the more that to decline meant death,
That you yourself press'd me with eagerness,
And nothing fear'd so much as my refusal;
That would moreover have involved your ruin,
For, after having dared to speak with me,
Your greatest danger lay in drawing back.
Yet (I would call your own complaints to witness),
Did I beguile you with false promises?
Recall how many times you have reproach'd me
With silence that betray'd my inward trouble;
The nearer to the crown you held before me,
The more I blamed myself and felt abash'd.
The Heav'n that heard me knows what vows sincere
I offer'd, which would surely have been kept,
Had but their pow'r been equal to my hopes,
And to my gratitude free scope afforded;
I with such honours and such dignities
Would have repaid your kindness and contented
Your pride, that even you, perhaps,—

ROXANA.

And how
Could you do aught to please me, keeping back

Your heart? What vows of yours could profit me?
Have you forgotten who and what I am?
That, mistress here, your life is in my pow'r?
That to my guidance Amurath has trusted
The helm of State, made me Sultana, me
The sovereign of his heart, tho' yours disowns
Allegiance? On this pinnacle of glory
Already set, how could you lift me higher?
A tempting lot, forsooth, to linger here,
Rejected by a wretch whom I had crown'd,
Degraded from my proper rank, and made
At best the foremost of my rival's slaves!

Enough of idle words—they weary me;
For the last time, say, will you live and reign?
Here is the Sultan's order, yet can I
Still save you, but be quick. Speak!

BAJAZET.

What is it

That I must do?

ROXANA.

Come with me instantly,
And see my rival die, strangled by mutes;
Then, from a love released fatal to greatness,
Pledge me your faith, and time will do the rest.
This is the price that you must pay for pardon.

BAJAZET.

Should I consent, 'twould be to wreak revenge
On you, to make my horror and my scorn
Brand you with infamy before the world.

But fury surely makes me mad, that thus
I whet your rage against poor Atalide!
If I am guilty, she is no accomplice;
If you are wrong'd, no part had she therein;
Unmoved by selfish jealousy, she urged
That I should give both heart and hand to you.
Let not my fault stain her transcendent virtue.
Pour out your wrath, but temper it with justice;
Without delay perform the Sultan's orders;

But let my death at least be free from hatred.
Not her has Amurath's sentence doom'd with me,
Then spare a life unfortunate enough:
Add this last favour to so many others,
And if you ever held me dear—

ROXANA.

Depart!

Scene 5.

ROXANA, FATIMA.

ROXANA.

Never again shalt thou behold me, traitor;
Thou marchest to the tomb that is thy due.

FATIMA

Atalide craves your ear a moment, Madam,
And fain would do obeisance at your feet.
She wishes to confide to you a secret
That touches you more nearly than herself.

ROXANA.

Yes, let her come. You, follow Bajazet,
And, when the time comes, tell me of his fate.

Scene 6.

ROXANA, ATALIDE.

ATALIDE.

I come not now to play the hypocrite,
Too long have I abused your goodness, Madam;
I blush to feel that I deserve your hatred,
And prostrate at your feet confess my crime.
Yes, Madam, it is true, I have deceived you;

My own heart's passion all my care engross'd,
At sight of Bajazet you were forgotten,
And every word I spoke betray'd my trust ;
I loved him from a child, and, ever since,
To keep him mine has been my constant study.
His royal mother, blind to Fate's decree,
Favour'd our union, and prepared his ruin.
You loved him later, better far for both
If you had known my heart, or, hiding yours,
Had with less confidence reposed on mine.
I do not wrong myself to justify
The prince. I swear by Heav'n, that sees my shame,
By those great ancestors from whom I spring,
Who kneel with me thus at your feet and plead
For their own blood, the purest they have left :
With time you would have won the love you sought,
And Bajazet been vanquish'd by your charms,
Had not my jealousy been prompt to urge
All that might hold him back ; naught I neglected,
Piteous complaints, or tears, or indignation,
And bade him reverence his mother's ashes.
This very day, the climax of misfortune,
Reproaching him with having raised your hopes,
And laying to his charge my death, I strove
With earnest importunity to wrest
A pledge that, giv'n at last against his will,
Has plunged him into ruin with myself.

But why should you be weary of your kindness,
Or dwell upon past coldness ? It was I
Who forced him to untie the knot, which soon
Will bind your hearts once more when I am gone.
And yet, howe'er my crime may merit death,
Do not, yourself, inflict just punishment,
Nor show Roxana to his frenzied eyes
Red with the blood of Atalide, but spare
His tender heart so violent a shock.
You need not fear to leave me to my fate ;
The stroke of death will suffer no delay
Thereby, nor fail your triumph to secure.
Crown him, and in a hero's love rejoice :
My death be my concern, his life be yours.

Go, Madam, go; and, ere you can return,
You shall not need to fear a rival more.

ROXANA.

I have no claim to sacrifice so great;
I judge myself and know my own demerits.
So far from parting you, I mean to-day
To bind you in inseparable bonds
For ever. Soon your eyes shall feast upon him.
Rise—

Fatima! What wild alarm has seized her!

Scene 7.

ROXANA, ATALIDE, FATIMA.

FATIMA.

Ah, Madam, come and see how all the palace
Is in possession of the traitor Achmet:
His friends with sacrilegious hands have forced
An entrance right into the royal harem.
Your trembling slaves, half of their number fled,
Doubt whether he obeys or violates
Your will.

ROXANA.

Let's hasten to confound the traitors.
You, guard my captive, if you love your life.

Scene 8.

ATALIDE, FATIMA.

ATALIDE.

Alas! I know not which should have my pray'rs,
The purposes of both alike unknown.
If any pity for such woes can touch you,
I beg you, Fatima, not to betray

Roxana's secrets, but to tell me only
How fares-it now with hapless Bajazet.
Say, have you seen him? Is his life in danger?

FATIMA.

I feel compassion for your troubles, Madam.

ATALIDE.

What! Has Roxana giv'n the fatal order
Already?

FATIMA.

I am pledged to secrecy.

ATALIDE.

Unhappy wretch, but tell me that he lives.

FATIMA.

'Tis much as life is worth to speak a word.

ATALIDE.

Too cruel thus to torture. Make an end;
And give her yet a surer proof of zeal,
This silence pains worse than a dagger's point.
Pitiless slave of a barbarian captive,
She fain would slay me,—pierce this heart yourself,
And show yourself worthy of such a mistress.
You cannot keep me here; this very hour
I must see Bajazet, or else must die.

Scene 9.

ATALIDE, ACHMET, FATIMA.

ACHMET.

Ah, tell me, Madam, where is Bajazet?
Have I yet time to save him? I have search'd
The palace through and through. At our first entrance
We parted company; with gallant Osman

Went half our valiant comrades, and the rest
Have follow'd me elsewhere with hasty steps ;
But all in vain, for frighten'd slaves alone
And flying women meet my anxious eyes.

ATALIDE.

Alas, I know his fate e'en less than you.
This slave can tell you all.

ACHMET.

Fear my just wrath.
Wretch, answer truly.

Scene 10.

ATALIDE, ACHMET, FATIMA, ZARA.

ZARA.

Madam—

ATALIDE.

Well, dear Zara,
What is it ?

ZARA.

Fear no longer, for your foe
Is dying.

ATALIDE.

Who ? Roxana ?

ZARA.

Ay, and what
May more surprise you, Orcan's hand has done it.

ATALIDE.

Orcan ?

ZARA.

No doubt despair at baffled crime
Has goaded him to take this other victim.

ATALIDE.

Heav'n's justice then has succour'd innocence !
The prince yet lives. Run, Achmet, and release him.

ZARA.

You will learn all the truth from Osman's lips,
Who saw it done.

Scene 11.

ATALIDE, ACHMET, OSMAN, ZARA.

ACHMET.

Have not her eyes deceived her ?
Is the Sultana dead ?

OSMAN.

Yes, I have seen
Th' assassin's dagger from her heart withdrawn
Wet with her blood. 'Twas Orcan's cruel hand
That did the deed, not unpremeditate,
For he had secret orders from the Sultan
To slay her lover first, and then Roxana.
Ere we drew near Orcan caught sight of us :
"Respect," said he, "your royal master's mandate,
And recognize his own imperial seal.
Hence, traitors, quit the palace you profane."
Saying these words, he left his dying victim,
Approach'd us, and with blood-stain'd hand unfolded
The written order Amurath had giv'n
The wretch, to execute this double murder.
But, loath to hear him longer, we, my lord,
Transported by the rage and grief that seized us,
With fierce impatience struck the monster down,
And so avenged the blood of Bajazet.

ATALIDE.

Of Bajazet ?

II.

F

ACHMET.

What say you ?

OSMAN.

He is dead.

Did you not know it ?

ATALIDE.

Gracious Heav'n

OSMAN.

Roxana,

Fearing your succour nigh, madden'd with fury,
His life abandon'd to the fatal bowstring.
That saddest of all sights myself I saw,
And vainly sought some lingering spark of life ;
The prince was dead. Around his body lay,
Dying or dead, a noble band who fought
For vengeance, and, by numbers overwhelm'd,
Accompanied his spirit to the shades.
Now all is lost, and we must save ourselves.

ACHMET.

Ah, cruel Fates, to what have ye reduced me !
Madam, I know the loss that you have suffer'd
In Bajazet, and reverence your sorrow
Too much to offer you the poor support
Of hearts whose hopes lean'd only upon him ;
His death has overwhelm'd me with despair,
No wish have I to save this guilty head,
But comrades in misfortune claim my care,
And to the end their lives will I defend.
As to yourself, if you would shelter find
In some far distant land, consider now
If you will trust my guidance: masters here,
My faithful friends your wishes will await,
While I, the favorable moment seizing,
Hasten to make all needful preparation ;
Then, where the sea washes the palace walls,
My vessels, furnish'd for their voyage, shall fetch you.

Scene 12.

ATALIDE, ZARA.

ATALIDE.

All then at last is over! My deceits,
Unjust suspicions, and accurst caprices
Have brought me to this hour of agony
When thro' my crime I see my lover die!
Was it not misery enough for me
That cruel Fate should doom me to survive him,
That I must suffer torment past endurance
Knowing his death due to my jealous madness?
Yes, my belovèd, it is I have slain thee,
I only, not Roxana, nor the Sultan.
My hand it was that wove the fatal snare
Into whose hateful meshes thou hast fall'n.
Yet I outlive this horror at my heart,
I, who so lately felt my senses leave me
At the mere dread of danger to his life.
Alas, and has my very love destroy'd thee?
I cannot think upon it more; be swift,
My trusty hand, and let my blood atone.

Ye heroes, who in him should have revived
Your glory, whose repose I have disturb'd;
Unhappy Mother, who with other hopes
Didst tell me that he loved me when a boy;
Ill-fated Achmet, friends disconsolate,
And thou, Roxana, banded all against me,
Come, add fresh anguish to a frantic heart,
And take on me the vengeance I deserve.

(She kills herself.)

ZARA.

Al. Madam—She is dead. Would God that I,
Heart broken as I am, with her might die!

MITHRIDATES.

1673.

INTRODUCTION TO MITHRIDATES.

"MITHRIDATES" appeared in 1673. None of the characters impress one with any very lively feeling; the struggle in Xiphares between amorous rivalry and filial devotion is perhaps the nearest approach made to powerful treatment. The play has a tragic ending so far as the fate of the nominal hero is concerned; but the chief interest of the reader or spectator is centred in the mutual affection of Monima and Xiphares, from the free indulgence of which all obstacles are removed by the final catastrophe. The closing scene, however, is one of sorrow and lamentation, in which the cry of "How are the mighty fallen" suffers no sound of rejoicing to be heard.

The historical features of the character and career of Mithridates VI. are in the main preserved, but Racine has complicated his relations with his sons by representing Monima as exerting an influence over them which is due to his own romantic imagination. Monima was in reality put to death by order of Mithridates, to prevent her falling into the hands of his previous conqueror, Lucullus. This was in the year B.C. 71, whereas his own death did not occur till B.C. 63.

CHARACTERS.

MITHRIDATES, *King of Pontus and of many other States.*

MONIMA, *betrothed to Mithridates, and already declared Queen.*

PHARNACES, } *Sons of Mithridates, but by different mothers.*
XIPHARES, }

ARBATES, *Friend of Mithridates, and Governor of Nymphæum.*

PHÆDIMA, *Friend of Monima.*

ARCAS, *Servant of Mithridates.*

Guards.

The scene is laid at Nymphæum, a seaport on the Cimmerian Bosphorus, in the Tauric Chersonesus (now the Crimea.)

MITHRIDATES.

A TRAGEDY.

ACT I.

Scene 1.

XIPHARES, ARBATES.

XIPHARES.

We have received a true report, Arbates ;
Rome triumphs, Mithridates is no more.
The Romans in a night attack surprised
My father's wonted prudence, near Euphrates ;
The conflict was a long one, but at last
His army, routed, left him on the field
Among the slain, and into Pompey's hand
A soldier, as I hear, his sword and crown
Deliver'd. Thus he who for forty years
Had baffled all Rome's bravest generals,
And in the east with uniform success
Maintain'd the common cause of all her kings,
Dies, leaving two ill-fated sons behind,
At variance with each other, to avenge him.

ARBATES.

You and your brother, Prince ! And does desire
To mount your father's throne already make you
A foe to Pharnaces ?

XIPHARES.

Nay, at such price
I would not buy, Arbates, the mere wreckage
Of an ill-fated empire. I respect
His birthright, and, contented with the States
Assign'd to me, shall see without regret
All that Rome's friendship promises fall ready
Into his hands.

ARBATES.

Rome's friendship with a son
Of Mithridates ! Is it true, my lord ?

XIPHARES.

Ay, Pharnaces has long at heart been Roman,
And now on Rome and Pompey rest his hopes :
While I, more faithful to my sire than ever,
Still to the Romans vow undying hatred.
But 'tis the least source of our strife that rises
From his pretensions and my enmity.

ARBATES.

What other motive arms your wrath against him ?

XIPHARES.

I shall surprise you. This fair Monima,
Who won the King our father's heart, of whom
My brother since declares himself the lover—

ARBATES.

Well, Prince ?

XIPHARES.

I love her, and may own my passion
Now that that brother is my only rival.
Doubtless you wonder at the words I speak,
But 'tis no secret of a few short days,
Long has this love of mine grown up in silence.
How I could make you realize its ardour,
My earliest sighs, my latest disappointment !
But in the state to which we are reduced

'Tis no fit time to task my memory
With the recital of an amorous tale.
Let it suffice, to justify myself,
That it was I who first beheld the Queen,
And loved her. Ere the name of Monima
Had reach'd my father's ears, her charms had roused
A lawful passion in my heart. He saw her,
And courted her, but with unworthy suit,
Deeming that she would prove an easy conquest,
Without presuming to claim marriage honours.
You know how warmly he assail'd her virtue,
And, weary of a long and fruitless struggle,
Absent, but never parted from his passion,
He by your hands sent her his diadem.
Judge of my grief, when tidings came that told
Too truly of the purpose of the King,
How Monima his destined bride had taken
Her journey hither under your protection !

'Twas then, ah ! odious time, my mother's eyes
Were open'd to the offers of the Romans.
Whether in jealous rage at these new nuptials,
Or to procure me Pompey's pow'rful favour,
My father she betray'd, and gave to Rome
The town and treasures to her care intrusted.
How did my mother's crime affect my feelings ?
No more I saw a rival in my father,
I thought not of the love his own had cross'd,
And had no eyes but for my father's wrongs.
Soon I attack'd the Romans ; and my mother,
Distracted, saw me wounded to the death
Recovering the place she had surrender'd,
And with my dying breath cursing her name.
Since then the Euxine has been free, and so
Remains ; from Pontus to the Bosphorus
All own'd my father's sway ; his fleet victorious
Found winds and waves its only enemies.
More I would fain have done ; I thought, Arbates,
To march upon Euphrates to his rescue,
When I was stunn'd by tidings of his death.
But mingled with my tears, I will confess it,
Back to my thoughts came charming Monima,

Intrusted by my father to your hands.
In these sad times I trembled for her life,
Dreading that in his cruel jealousy
The King, as oft before with many a mistress,
Might means have taken to secure her death.
Hither I flew, and 'neath Nymphæum's walls
My anxious eyes encounter'd Pharnaces,
A sight, I trow, of evil augury.
You received both of us, and know the rest.
Hasty in all his actions, Pharnaces
Of his presumptuous wishes made no secret,
Related to the Queen my father's ruin,
And, since the King was dead, offer'd himself
To fill his place ; nor will his deeds fall short
Of words. I too will show what I can do.
The love that bade me reverence a sire
To whom from childhood I have own'd submission,
This very love, now rising in revolt,
Scorns the authority of this new rival.
Either the suit I venture to advance
Must be by Monima herself rejected,
Or else, whatever ill may come of it,
She shall not be another's, while I live.

Thus have I told the secrets of my heart ;
With you it rests to choose the side you take.
Which of us seems the worthier of allegiance,
The slave of Rome, or Mithridates' son ?
Proud of her friendship, Pharnaces, no doubt,
Thinks to command all here, and to dictate
To me, where I refuse to own his pow'r :
His heritage is Pontus, Colchis mine,
And ever have the Colchian princes claim'd
This Bosphorus as to their realms belonging.

ARBATES.

Whatever strength I have is at your service,
My choice is made already, I will do
My duty, and the self-same zeal and valour
With which I served your father and maintain'd
This place against your brother and yourself,
Now that the King is dead, shall aid your efforts

Against all foes. Had it not been for you,
My certain death would, I know well, have follow'd
Your brother's entrance, and my blood have stain'd
These ramparts which he vainly sought to storm.
As to the Queen, you need not fear her choice,
And for the rest, unless false shadows mock me,
Pharnaces soon will leave you master here
To reap elsewhere the harvest of Rome's bounty.

XIPHARES.

Thanks, dear Arbates!

But I hear a footstep.
Leave me, my friend. 'Tis Monima herself.

Scene 2.

MONIMA, XIPHARES.

MONIMA.

My lord, I come to you; for if to-day
You help me not, then my last hope is gone.
Orphan'd and friendless, full of fears, forsaken,
Long call'd a queen, yet all the time a captive,
A widow now tho' never yet a wife,
'These are, my lord, the lightest of my woes.
I tremble in your ears to breathe the name
Of my oppressor, but a heart so great
Will not, I trust, to ties of kindred blood
Between you, sacrifice the tears of grief.
Ay, now you know his name. 'Tis Pharnaces,
'Tis he, my lord, whose criminal presumption
Would by main force fast bind me to himself
In wedlock that to me were worse than death.
What baleful star must on my birth have shone!
Destined to loveless union with another,
Scarce am I free to taste a moment's peace
When to a yoke yet heavier I must bend.
Perchance, more humble in my misery,
I should remember that it is his brother

To whom I speak. But whether reason prompts,
Or fate, or hatred that with him confounds
The Rome whose aid he seeks, no marriage yet
Was e'er more odious than the one I dread.
And if I cannot move you with my tears,
If I have naught to trust but my despair,
At the same altar where I stand a bride
You shall see Monima, thus only freed
From tyranny, fall stricken to the heart,
A heart that ne'er was hers to give away.

XIPHARES.

Madam, of my obedience rest assured ;
Here your authority is paramount :
Let Pharnaces, if so he will, elsewhere
Make himself dreaded. But you know not yet
All your distress.

MONIMA.

Ah, what fresh trouble then
Frowns upon Monima ?

XIPHARES.

If loving you
Is sin, not Pharnaces alone is guilty ;
My crime is worse a thousand times than his.

MONIMA.

Yours ?

XIPHARES.

Reckon this the climax of misfortunes.
Invoke the heav'nly Pow'rs, if so you must,
Against a seed accurst, born to torment
And persecute you, sire and sons alike.
But howsoever bitter the surprise
With which you hear me own this fatal love,
Never could all your woes together reach
The anguish of my efforts to conceal it.
Yet think not that, like Pharnaces, my brother,
I serve you now to take his place hereafter ;
You would be free, I pledge my word you shall be ;

Neither on Pharnaces nor me dependent.
But when your wishes have been satisfied,
Where will you choose the place of your retreat?
In regions far remote or near my States?
Shall I be suffer'd to escort you thither?
With the same eye will you regard my homage
And his oppression? Flying from my rival,
From me too will you fly? And for reward
Of faithful service banish me for ever?

MONIMA.

Ah, what is this you tell me?

XIPHARES.

If advantage
In time, fair Monima, confers a right,
Here I assure you it was I who first
Saw and admired, resolved to make you mine,
When, to my sire unknown, your budding charms
Rejoiced your mother's eye, and hers alone.
If, by my duty forced to quit your side,
I could not all my ardent love display,
Have you lost all remembrance of the grief
With which I oft bewail'd that sad constraint?
Have you forgotten my last fond farewells
At parting from the sight of your sweet eyes?
My heart alone retains those memories;
Confess that I recall a vanish'd dream.
While far from you and hopeless of return
I cherish'd still an unrequited love,
You well content to wed my sire, scarce heaved
A single sigh in sympathy for me.

MONIMA.

Alas!

XIPHARES.

Did my distress one moment move you?

MONIMA.

Prince, do not mock me in my misery.

XIPHARES.

Mock you ? Ye gods ! when eager to defend you,
Daring to press no claim, asking for nothing,
What shall I say, then ? When I give my promise
To place you where you ne'er shall see me more !

MONIMA.

You promise what you never will perform.

XIPHARES.

What ! Will you not believe my solemn oath ?
Think you that I shall so abuse my pow'r,
And that I mean to curb your liberty ?
Explain yourself, I pray you.

Someone comes.

One word.

MONIMA.

Protect me from your brother's rage :
To make me grant consent to see you, Sir,
You need not have recourse to tyranny.

XIPHARES.

Ah, Madam !

MONIMA.

Prince, you see your brother comes.

Scene 3.

MONIMA, PHARNACES, XIPHARES.

PHARNACES.

How long will you expect my father, Madam ?
Fresh witness to his death arrives each moment
To satisfy your doubt and chide delay.
Come, fly with me from this delightful clime,
Whose savage aspect cannot but remind you
Of bondage hard ; obedient subjects wait you

'Neath happier skies and worthier of your charms.
Pontus has long acknowledged you her queen,
Still wears your brow the royal diadem
As token of your sovereignty, and pledge
Of her assured submission to your sway.
I by my father's will am master there,
And 'tis my privilege to keep his promise.
But, trust me, time is pressing, tarry not,
Our marriage and departure must be hasten'd ;
Our common interests and my heart demand it.
My ships are ready, waiting to receive you,
And from the altar you may go aboard,
Queen of the seas that are to bear you hence.

MONIMA.

Such kindness, Sir, I find too overwhelming.
But since time presses, and I needs must answer,
May I without disguise freely express
The secret feelings of my heart ?

PHARNACES.

You may,
And that without reserve.

MONIMA.

To you I think
My origin is known ; of Ephesus
A native, but of royal ancestry.
Kings were my sires, or heroes whom erewhile
Greece for their virtues rank'd higher than kings.
When Mithridates saw me, Ephesus
And all Ionia crown'd his prosperous arms.
This pledge of faithful love he deign'd to send me,
My family presumed not to dispute
His sovereign will. A slave, tho' crown'd, I went
To be his bride, as fortune had ordain'd.
While he in Pontus waited to receive me,
New projects call'd him thence, and he obey'd
The summons to wage war against the Romans,
Sending me hither to avoid the storm.

I came, and here I still abide. My father
Paid dear, however, for that dangerous honour,
For the first victim of victorious Rome
Was Philopœmen, sire of Monima;
A fatal title, costing him his life,
It was to speak of that I wish'd to see you.
However justly moved to indignation,
I have no army to oppose to Rome;
Helpless I witness all her injuries,
No sceptre mine nor soldiers to avenge me,
Only a heart to feel. All I can do
Is to be faithful to my filial duty,
Nor in my father's blood imbrue my hands
By wedding you, the sworn ally of Rome.

PHARNACES.

Why speak you thus of Rome and her alliance?
Why this suspicion and these words of anger?
Who told you that the Romans are my friends?

MONIMA.

Can you, my lord, deny that so it is?
How could you offer welcome as a queen
To me where all the land is in their pow'r.
Did not a secret treaty with the Romans
Smooth your way thither and secure your throne?

PHARNACES.

I might inform you of my purposes,
For which I have good reasons, and could state them,
If, leaving once for all these vain disguises,
You had explain'd to me your secret feelings.
But now, long baffled, I begin to gather
The meaning of your manifold excuses;
I see an int'rest you would fain conceal,
Another than a father prompts your speech.

XIPHARES.

Whatever motive may inspire her words,
At least, Sir, they deserve no doubtful answer,

Nor should your just resentment against Rome
One moment hesitate to burst in fury.
What! After having learn'd our sire's disgrace,
Slow to avenge him, swift to fill his place,
Shall we forget our honour and his blood?
We know that he is dead, but he may lie
Unburied. While your soul with eager hope
Dwells on the thought of hymeneal bliss,
This King, whom all the East, full of his feats,
May justly name her last and greatest hero,
In his own realms deprived of funeral rites,
Or laid dishonour'd 'mid a meaner crowd,
Perchance accuses Heav'n's unjust neglect
And two unworthy sons who dare not fight
For vengeance. Why should we lurk longer here?
If any prince still free in all the world,
Parthian, Sarmatian, Scythian, loves his freedom,
There let us find allies and march beside them,
To live or die, true sons of Mithridates.
Whatever love beguiles us, let us think
Rather of rescue from a foreign yoke,
Than of constraining hearts that will not yield.

PHARNACES.

He knows your feelings. Was I wrong, fair lady?
Your father and my fancied league with Rome
Are but the pretext for a stronger reason.

XIPHARES.

Her secret feelings are to me unknown;
But if I thought, like you, that I could read them,
I would submit my claims to their decision.

PHARNACES.

You would do well; and I too know my duty.
I am not bound to copy your example.

XIPHARES.

Here know I none at least who may presume
To shape his conduct on another model.

PHARNACES.

So might you boast in Colchis I admit.

XIPHARES.

Here and in Colchis is my right the same.

PHARNACES.

Not here, I ween, if you would 'scape destruction.

Scene 4.

MONIMA, PHARNACES, XIPHARES, PHÆDIMA.

PHÆDIMA.

Princes, the sea is all alive with ships,
And soon, despite the tidings of his death,
Will Mithridates disembark in person.

MONIMA.

The King !

XIPHARES.

My father !

PHARNACES.

What is this I hear !

PHÆDIMA.

Despatch boats have arrived to bring the news ;
'Tis he himself, and, prompt to pay due homage,
Arbates goes to greet him ere he lands.

XIPHARES (*to MONIMA*).

What have we done !

MONIMA (*to XIPHARES*).

Farewell, Prince. Wondrous tidings !

Scene 5.

PHARNACES, XIPHARES.

• PHARNACES (*aside*).

The King returns! Ah, cruel stroke of Fortune!
My life and love are both in jeopardy.
Th'expected Romans will arrive too late:
What shall I do?

• (To XIPHARES.)

I know your heart is sore,
I can imagine her sad words at parting;
But this is not the time to speak of that,
Cares more important task our thoughts to-day.
The King returns, perchance implacable;
More dreadful he, the more unfortunate.
The peril is far worse than you suppose;
We verily are guilty, and you know him,
How rarely tenderness disarms his rage.
His sons can have no more relentless judge,
As shown to two of them who died the victims
Of mere suspicion. We have greater reason
To fear, each for himself, and for the Queen.
I pity her the more, the more he loves her;
For angorous ardour piques his jealousy,
And hatred ever far outstrips his love.
Place no reliance on his past affection,
His jealous fury will burn all the fiercer.
Consider well. The favour of the army
Is yours. I speak not of mine own resources.
Be ruled by me. Let us secure our pardon,
Make ourselves masters of this place, and so
Force him to offer to his sons such terms
As they shall be contented to accept.

XIPHARES.

I recognize my guilt, and know my father,
My mother's crime besides have I to bear;

*But tho' my eyes are dazzled still with love,
When comes my sire I cannot but obey him.

PHARNACES.

Let us at least be faithful to each other ;
You know my secret, I have read your own.
The King, devising ever dangerous wiles,
Will turn our slightest words to our destruction ;
You know his way, how tenderness can mask
Deceitful hatred. Lead and I will follow,
Since it must needs be so, but, while submitting
To duty, let us scorn to act the traitor.

ACT II.

Scene 1.

MONIMA, PHÆDIMA.

PHÆDIMA.

What ! you here still, when Mithridates lands !
When all are flocking to the shore in welcome !
What mean you, Madam ? What remembrance checks
Your steps, and makes you turn them back ? Will you
Offend a King whose soul adores you only,
Almost his wife—

MONIMA.

Not yet, dear Phædima ;
And till that time I think my duty bids me
Await him here, and not go forth to greet him.

PHÆDIMA.

Nay, you must not regard him as a lover
Of common rank. Betrothed to this great King,
Bound by a father's promise, you have pledges
Which, when he will, the solemn rites of marriage
May ratify. Go forth, and show yourself.

MONIMA.

See, would you have me meet him as I am?
Look at this tear-stain'd face, and tell me rather
To hide myself than seek his presence thus.

• PHÆDIMA.

Heav'ns! What is this?

MONIMA.

It kills me, his return!
Wretch that I am, how can I dare to face him?
His diadem on my brow, and in my heart—
Can you not read its secret in these blushes?

• PHÆDIMA.

What, is it so? Crush'd by the same alarms
That made you shed so many tears in Greece?
Your path seems always cross'd by Xiphares.

MONIMA.

Greater than you can think is my distress.
Then, in my thoughts I dwelt on Xiphares
Only as noble, virtuous, and brave;
I knew not that, inflamed with love for me,
He was of mortals the most amorous.

PHÆDIMA.

He loves you, Madam? And this charming hero—

MONIMA.

Is no less wretched, Phædima, than I.
His heart adores me, and the self-same sorrow
That here tormented me elsewhere consumed him.

PHÆDIMA.

Knows he how far he has secured your favour?
Is he aware you love him?

MONIMA.

No, dear friend.
Heav'n guarded me from that; I kept strict silence,
Or said at most but half of what I felt.
Ah, if you only knew how this sad heart
Has striv'n its resolution to maintain,
What conflicts, what assaults I have endured!
Hark, Phœdima, I never more will see him,
If I can help it. Vain were all my efforts,
I should be forced to speak, were I again
To see his grief. He'll come in spite of me,
And tear my secret from me; but no joy
His love will thence derive; so dear the cost,
'Twere better had his bliss remain'd unknown.

PHÆDIMA.

See, they are coming. What is to be done?

MONIMA.

I cannot, will not meet him, thus distracted.

Scene 2.

MITHRIDATES, PHARNACES, XIPHARES, ARBATES,
GUARDS.

MITHRIDATES.

Princes, whate'er excuses you may frame,
Your duty never should have brought you hither,
Nor made you quit, at such a time of need,
Pontus and Colchis, to your care confided.
But an indulgent father is your judge.
Those rumours you believed which I myself
Dispersed; and, since you wish it, I will deem
You guiltless, and thank Heav'n for this our meeting.
Vanquish'd as I have been, and all but shipwreck'd,
I nurse a project worthy of my courage,
Of which you soon shall learn the full details.
But go, and leave me to repose a moment.

Scene 3.

MITHRIDATES, ARBATES.

MITHRIDATES.

A year is gone, and once again you see me,
But not as erst the favourite child of Fortune,
Who kept the destinies of Rome suspended,
Her rival for the empire of the world :
I have been conquer'd. Pompey took advantage
Of darkness that left little room for courage ;
My troops unarm'd, or in the gloom affrighted,
Their ranks attack'd on all sides unawares,
While wild disorder magnified their fears
And made them turn their weapons on their comrades,
Loud cries terrific from the rocks resounding,
All the worst horrors of a midnight conflict ;
In such confusion what could valour do
To help us ? Many fell, flight saved the rest ;
So great the panic, that I owe my life
To tidings of my slaughter left behind me.
Some time unrecognized, I cross'd the Phasis,
Thence to the foot of Caucasus I press'd,
Soon I took shipping ready in the Euxine,
And join'd the scatter'd fragments of my army.
Thus, driven by disastrous fortune hither,
In Bosphorus I find new woes await me.
With the same love you see me still inflamed
As ever ; and this heart, tho' fed with carnage
And hungry still, despite the weight of years
And dire misfortunes, passionately clings
To Monima, where'er I roam, and finds
Its worst foes here in two ungrateful sons.

ARBATES.

Both of them, Sire ?

MITHRIDATES.

Listen. My rage admits
That Xiphares is different from his brother.

I know him ever to my will obedient,
 Hating our common foe as much as I do ;
 And I have seen his valour justify
 My secret tenderness, display'd to please me.
 I know too, ay I know, with what despair,
 To every other claim preferring duty,
 He hasten'd to disown a faithless mother,
 And from her crime won a fresh crown of glory ;
 I dare not, cannot think that, after all,
 So good a son has wilfully offended.
 But what concern had either of them here ?
 Have they not both made offers to the Queen ?
 To which seems secretly her heart inclined ?
 And with what looks shall I myself accost her ?
 Speak. Strongly as I feel her sweet attraction,
 I must be told how matters stand between them.
 What has occur'd ? What have you seen ? What know
 you ?
 How came you to submit ? Since when ? and why ?

ARBATES.

Eight days ago did Pharnaces come first
 Beneath these walls, with his authority
 Confirming the vague rumour of your death,
 Impatient for admittance ; but no heed
 Paid I to what I deem'd his rash assertions,
 And deaf remain'd, until the Prince, his brother,
 Less by his words, my liege, than by his tears
 Assured me of their truth on his arrival.

MITHRIDATES.

What did they then ?

ARBATES.

Scarce had the former enter'd,
 When in hot haste he urged his amorous suit,
 And promised as her husband to secure
 To her the diadem your hand bestow'd.

MITHRIDATES.

The traitor ! What, without a moment giv'n

To shed the tears that to my shade were due !
What of his brother ?

ARBATES.

Till this very day
His conduct has betray'd no sign of love,
But all his soul, in sympathy with yours,
Has seem'd to breathe no thought but war and vengeance.

MITHRIDATES.

What purpose brought him hither, then, Arbates ?

ARBATES.

That you will learn sooner or later, Sire.

MITHRIDATES.

Speak, I command you ; I must hear it now.

ARBATES.

E'en till this very day his plea has been
That he was justified, after your death,
In reckoning this province as his own ;
And, calling courage to support his claim,
He came to take his heritage by force.

MITHRIDATES.

That were the least reward he could expect,
Should Heav'n permit me to bequeath my pow'r.
I breathe once more, Arbates, glad at heart :
I trembled, I confess, both for a son
Beloved, and for myself lest I had lost
So sure a stay, and found myself at war
With such a rival ; not like Pharnaces
Who has so long confronted my displeasure,
And, holding Rome in secret admiration,
Has ne'er opposed her but with sore reluctance.
And if with favour Monima regards him,
Lavish elsewhere of love that is my due,
Then woe betide the wretch who comes to rob me,

Defies his father and disdains his yoke !
Say, does she love him ?

ARBATES.

Here she comes, my liege.

Scene 4.

MITHRIDATES, MONIMA.

MITHRIDATES.

Madam, kind Heav'n at last has brought me back
To you, and, seconding my tender wishes,
Restores you to my love fairer than ever.
I little thought that I should have to wait
So long to celebrate our marriage rites,
Nor that misfortune, marking my return,
Would show my sorrow rather than my love.
Yet 'tis that love which leads me to your side,
Nor let me choose another place of refuge ;
And my worst troubles lose their bitterness
If but my presence here brings none to you.
To tell me so, only vouchsafe to hear me.
Have you not long look'd forward to this day ?
You wear a pledge of my sincerity,
Which ever tells you that you are my own.
Come then, and let us seal our mutual vows ;
Far hence the voice of Glory summons us,
And, without hindrance to this grand design,
Wedded to-day, we must depart to-morrow.

MONIMA.

Your will is law ; the authors of my life
Their sov'reign empire have on you conferr'd ;
Whene'er you choose to exercise that right,
I have no other answer but t' obey.

MITHRIDATES.

So, Madam, to an irksome yoke submissive,

You to the altar go but as a victim ;
And I, constraining a reluctant heart,
Shall owe no thanks to you for its possession.
Think you that such compliance can content me ?
Must I henceforth, despairing of your love,
Aspire to be your tyrant, nothing more ?
Have my misfortunes then made you despise me ?
Ah, were I yet new conquests to attempt,
With every obstacle to check my march,
To lower depths cast down by hostile Fate,
Vanquish'd, pursued, helpless, my sceptre lost,
Flying from sea to sea, less king than pirate,
The name of Mithridates only left me,
Know that that name alone, renown'd in story,
Would win for me the world's admiring gaze ;
There would not be a king worthy to reign
Who, seated on his throne, would not prefer
To royal splendour my more glorious ruin,
Which Rome and forty years have scarce effected.
With other eyes would you yourself behold me,
If in your soul your Grecian sires revived.
And since, in fine, your husband I must be,
Were it not nobler, worthier of yourself,
To freely choose what you accept from duty,
Oppose to Fortune's buffets your esteem,
And, soothing my distress, give me a balm
Against despair that dogs misfortune's steps ?—

What, Madam, have you no reply to make ?
Serves all my ardour only to confound you ?
Still you are dumb, and, even worse than silence,
I see, tho' you would hide them, rising tears.

MONIMA.

Oh, no, my lord ! I have no tears to shed.
Have you not had my answer ? I obey.
And is it not enough—

MITHRIDATES.

Nay, it is not.
Understand this better than you think :

I see they told me true, just jealousy
By your own words is but too well confirm'd ;
A faithless son, smitten by such rare beauty,
I see has wooed, and finds a willing ear.
New terrors now I waken in your breast
For him, but not for long shall he enjoy
Your care ; if my commands are heeded still,
On him your faithless eyes have look'd their last.
Call Xiphares.

MONIMA

Alas ! What will you do ?

He—

MITHRIDATES.

Xiphares has not betray'd his father,
You need not be so eager to disown him ;
He has done nothing to estrange my love.
Your crime were less, as less would be my shame,
If one so worthy of your high regard
Had roused some touches of yet warmer feelings.
But that a traitor, bold in disobedience,
In whom no virtue palliates presumption,
That Pharnaces, forsooth, should thus supplant me,
That he should be beloved, and I detested—

Scene 5.

MITHRIDATES, MONIMA, XIPHARES.

MITHRIDATES.

Come, my son, come, your father is betray'd.
I have a son who dares to mock my ruin,
'Thwarts my designs, inflicts a fatal wound,
Ay, to my Queen makes love, and wins her favour,
Stealing a heart she owes to me alone.
Yet am I happy in this deep dishonour
To blame no other son than Pharnaces,
To know a mother's treason and a brother's
Audacious plots have fail'd to make you swerve .

From duty! Yes, my son, on you alone
I lean, and long have chosen you to be
The worthy comrade of my great designs,
Heir of my sceptre and my glorious name.
Not now may Pharnaces and outraged love
Engross my thoughts; the careful preparation
For an important enterprise, my ships
Which I must hold in readiness to sail,
My soldiers whose devotion I would try,
Demand my presence at this very hour.
Do you, however, here keep watch for me,
And foil the plots of an insidious rival;
Nor quit the Queen, but strive to overcome
Her opposition to a King who loves her;
Dissuade her from a choice iniquitous,
And your unbiass'd judgment will convince her
Better than I can. She has proved my weakness,
Let her not try that tenderness too far,
Or it may turn to fury, unrepented
Till vengeance has atoned for wrong resented.

Scene 6.

MONIMA, XIPHARES.

XIPHARES.

What shall I say? How may I understand
This charge, these words incomprehensible?
Great gods! Can it be true that Pharnaces,
Too dear to you, indeed deserves this rage?
That your distress is all for Pharnaces?

MONIMA.

For Pharnaces! Why speak of Pharnaces?
Heav'ns! Is it not enough that this sad day
Robs me of all I loved for evermore,
And that I find myself, the slave of duty,
Fast bound with chains of sorrow and despair?

Must this last insult to my grief be added,
That I be thought to weep for Pharnaces,
In spite of all my hatred deem'd too dear?
I can forgive the King, blinded by anger,
To him my heart must never be reveal'd;
But you, my lord, but you, to treat me so!

XIPHARES.

Ah, Madam, pardon a distracted lover,
Who, himself bound by cruel bonds of duty,
Sees threaten'd loss of all, nor dares take vengeance.
But how am I to judge of the King's fury?
What other love is this with his conflicting?
Who then can be this happy criminal?
Speak.

MONIMA.

Why so ready to increase your woe
With self-inflicted torture?

XIPHARES.

Ay, these fears
Add pangs to which it were a light affliction
To see her whom I love my father's bride;
To see a rival honour'd with your tears,
This is indeed my crowning agony.
But in despair I fain would know the worst.
Tell me for pity's sake who is this lover,
And change suspicion into certainty.

MONIMA.

Is it so hard for you to guess the truth?
Just now, when I sought refuge from constraint
Of pow'r unjust, to whom did I appeal?
On whose kind succour did my heart rely?
Whose words of love heard I without displeasure?

XIPHARES.

Heav'ns! Can it be I am the lucky culprit

Whom you are pleased to look upon with favour?
Was it for Xiphares you deign'd to weep?

MONIMA.

Yes, Prince: I cannot keep the secret longer,
My sorrow is too violent for silence.
Tho' Duty's stern decree condemns my tongue,
Yet must I violate her harsh commands,
And utter for the first time and the last
The language of my heart. Long have you loved me,
Long has an equal tenderness for you
Moved me with sad concern. Retrace the time
When first you own'd affection for these charms
Unworthy of your praise, the short-lived hope,
The trouble that your father's passion raised,
Tortured to lose me and to see him blest,
To bow to duty when your heart was torn.
You cannot, Prince, recall those memories
Without repeating in your own misfortunes
My story too; and, when I heard this morning
Your tale, my heart responded to it all.
Futile or rather fatal sympathy!
Union too perfect to be realized!
Ah! with what cruel care did Heav'n entwine
Two hearts it never destined for each other!
For, howsoe'er my heart is drawn to yours,
I tell you once for all, where Honour leads
I needs must follow, even to the altar,
To swear to you an everlasting silence.
I hear you groan: but, miserable fate,
Your father claims me, I may ne'er be yours.
You must yourself support my feeble will,
And help me from my heart to banish you;
Let me at least rely upon your kindness
My presence to avoid henceforth for ever.
Have I not said enough, Sir, to persuade you
How many reasons urge you to obey me?
After this moment, if that gallant heart
Has ever felt true love for Monima,
I will not recognize its loyalty
Save by the care you take to shun me always.

XIPHARES.

Great gods! How terrible a test of love
Ill-starr'd! How happiness and misery
Are mine at once! From what a glorious height
To what an awful gulf you cast me down!
Have I prevail'd to touch a heart like yours,
And won your love, only to see another
Possess that heart which fondly clings to mine?
Father unjust and cruel,—but withal
Unhappy too!—

So you would have me fly.
And yet the King has bidden me attend you.
What will he say?

MONIMA.

It matters not. Obey me.
Contrive such reasons as may blind his eyes;
Prove your heroic nature by an effort
Supreme. And for your own self-sacrifice
Tax quick invention, as less noble lovers
Have done to gratify their cherish'd hopes.
Weak as I know myself, with life at stake,
I cannot but distrust my strongest efforts;
The sight of you would wake fond memories,
And guilty sighs betray the aching heart
Which, torn asunder by a secret strife,
Would fain fly back to you, pow'rless to bear
Its separation. But if it depends
On you to make me cherish thoughts so sweet,
I know you will do nothing to prevent me
From vindicating straight offended honour,
When, searching for your image in my heart,
My hand shall tear it thence, and leave me free
From shame. But, ah, while yet a few brief moments
Are left us, how I take a fatal pleasure
In seeking to prolong the risk I shun,
And wish, the more I speak, for one word more.
Oh, but I needs must force myself to fly,
Nor lose in parting words the feeble relics
Of firmness. Prince, I go; farewell; remember,
See me no more; prove worthy of my tears.

XIPHARES.

Ah, Madam—

She is gone, she will not hear me.
Unhappy Xiphares, what wilt thou do,
Banish'd and yet beloved? One thing is clear,
The path of duty is for her and thee
The same. Swift death must end this agony.
Yet till her fate is certain, let me wait;
And, if a rival Monima must own,
Dying I'll yield her to the King alone.

ACT III.

Scene 1.

MITHRIDATES, PHARNACES, XIPHARES.

MITHRIDATES.

Draw near, my sons. At last the hour is come
My secret purpose to display before you;
All things conspire to aid this noble venture;
Nothing remains but to inform you of it.

I am a fugitive: so hostile Fortune
Has will'd, but my life's history you know
Too well to think that, long courting concealment,
I should await my hunters in these deserts.
War has its favours as it has its losses;
Already more than once, my course retracing,—
While, by my flight deceived, the foe in triumph
Rode thro' the streets of Rome, 'mid idle plaudits,
And, graving his vain victories on brass,
Display'd my conquer'd realms in captive chains,—
The Bosphorus has seen me with fresh fleets
Swarming from all her marshes, spreading terror,
And from astonish'd Asia chasing Rome's
Battalions back, undoing in a day
Work of a year. New times demand new cares.
Fiercer attacks have overwhelm'd the East,

Its plains are cover'd with yet vaster hosts
Of Romans, whom the war at our expense
Enriches. Greedy of all nations' wealth,
Our rumour'd hoards have drawn the robbers thither;
In crowds they rush, each of his neighbour jealous,
Leaving their own to inundate our land.
I only dare resist: worn or subdued,
All my allies discard my fatal friendship,
A burden that their heads can ill support.
Pompey's great name makes his success assured,
All Asia's dread; I will not seek him there,
Nay, 'tis to Rome, my sons, I mean to march.
Surprised at this bold stroke, you think perhaps
Despair alone can give it birth to-day.
I pardon your mistake; projects like this
Seem folly till successfully accomplish'd.
Do not suppose that Rome from us is parted
By ramparts of eternal separation:
I know each mountain pass that I must traverse,
And, if not thwarted by untimely death,
I need not set it farther, three months hence,
And you shall mount the Capitol with me.
Two days upon the Euxine, never doubt it,
Will waft us westward to the Danube's mouth.
Scythia with me has sworn a strict alliance,
Which lays the entrance into Europe open.
There gathering our forces in their ports,
Their troops will join our ranks, and at each step
Dacians, Pannonians, Germans swell our numbers;
All wait but for a leader to repel
The common tyrant. Have not Spain and Gaul
Sought to excite my vengeance 'gainst those walls
That Brennus once laid low? Yea, Greece herself
Has by her envoys' months blamed me for lack
Of vigour. Ready to o'erflow on them,
This torrent, bearing me along, they know
Will whelm them all. And to prevent its ravage,
They'll guide and follow me to Italy.
There will you find Rome's name in horror held
Supreme, the fires still smouldering thro' the land
Which Freedom kindled with her dying breath.

No, Princes, 'tis not in earth's realms remote
Rome's galling fetters weigh most heavily :
The nearer that she is the more abhorr'd,
Rome's greatest enemies are at her gates.
Ah ! if they chose, to free them from her yoke,
Vile Spartacus, the gladiator slave,
And follow'd vengeance with a band of robbers ;
Think with what noble ardour will their ranks
March 'neath the colours of a conquering King
Whose royal line from Cyrus boasts descent !
Think, too, how we will take her by surprise,
Strip of the legions that might else defend her,
Were they not all busied in my pursuit.
Will babes and women have the pow'r to stop me ?

Let us march on, and carry to her heart
The havoc which she spreads from east to west ;
Let those proud conquerors crouch behind their walls,
And tremble in their turn for hearth and home.
Let us believe what Hannibal predicted,
The Romans, save in Rome, will ne'er be vanquish'd.
Let her own blood in righteous torrents drown her,
And let the Capitol, that thought to see me
In chains, to ashes sink ; let us destroy
Its glory, and blot out the shame of kings
Of every tribe and nation, with my own.
Let fire consume all those illustrious names
Devoted there to endless infamy.

Lo, this is the ambition that has seized me !
But think not I will suffer Rome in peace
To lord it over Asia in my absence ;
I know where I shall find her stout defenders.
Rome, everywhere surrounded by fierce foes,
Shall call in vain on Pompey to relieve her.
The Parthian, name dreadful to Rome as mine,
Is ready to take up my righteous quarrel ;
To seal this bond with union of our blood,
He asks of me a son to wed his daughter.
I for this honour have made choice of you,
My Pharnaces ; go, be the happy bridegroom.
No longer I delay ; to-morrow's dawn
Shall see my ships far from the Bosphorus.

Go you at once, since nothing here detains you,
And let your ardour justify my choice.
The marriage rites perform'd, re-cross Euphrates,
Let Asia see another Mithridates,
And terror blanch the faces of our foes,
While I at Rome rejoice to hear the tidings.

PHARNACES.

Sir, you surprise me, and I cannot hide it.
This grand attempt I hear with admiration ;
A bolder project never yet was broach'd
To make the vanquish'd turn the tide of war ;
That dauntless heart in you I most admire
Which seems to rise more strong for being crush'd.
And yet, if I may dare to speak with frankness,
Are you reduced to this extremity ?
Why go so far on such a desperate errand,
While still your states offer a safe asylum ?
Why undertake so difficult a task,
Fitter for leader of a band of exiles
Than for a monarch on whose banners Hope
So lately smiled, wherever he appear'd,
Who founded upon thirty states the throne
Whose ruin leaves a mighty empire yet ?
You, after two score years, you, only you
Have courage left to struggle against Fate.
To Rome and to repose relentless foe,
Count not on troops heroic as yourself.
Think not that hearts made timid by disaster,
Worn out with hardships and a long retreat,
Are eager to meet death 'neath foreign skies,
Encountering toils more terrible than dangers.
If routed when their country's eyes were on them,
How will they meet the conqueror's fury there ?
In his own city, with his gods before him,
Will he strike less alarm, or yield himself
An easier prey ?

So Parthia seeks alliance
With you in marriage. Prompt to lend her aid
When all the world seem'd our support, will she
Receive a son-in-law poor and defenceless ?

What! shall I go, an outcast and alone,
To prove the Parthian faithless as of yore,
And haply, as the fruit of match so hasty,
Expose your credit to his court's contempt?
At least, if stoop we must, if we must borrow
The unaccustom'd gestures of a suppliant,
Send me not to embrace the Parthian's knees,
Nor beg from kings whose pow'r is less than yours.
Can we not take a surer course than that?
And, falling into arms of joyful welcome,
Rome, readily appeased, will grant us favour—

• XIPHARES.

Rome! Does my brother then dare to propose
Such base humiliation to the King,
As in one day to make his life's long course
A lie, to trust the Romans, and submit
To tyranny* for forty years resisted?

Onward, my father! Vanquish'd as you are,
War and its perils are your only refuge!
Rome has in you a fatal foe, whose oath
Is more implacable than Hannibal's.
All crimson with her blood, do what you may,
Ne'er look for peace but thro' such butchery
As on a single day in Asia blasted
A hundred thousand Romans by your order.

Yet spare your own inviolable head,
March not yourself from land to land, nor show
To gaping nations Mithridates humbled,
Dark'ning the brilliant lustre of your name.
The vengeance you must execute is just;
Lay Rome in ruins, burn the Capitol.
But 'tis enough for you to point the way;
To younger hands pass on the fiery torch,
And, while my brother keeps control of Asia,
Honour my courage with this high exploit.
Give the command, and let us justify
Our title as your sons, heirs of your name
Thro' all the world. Set east and west in flames,
While still you tarry in the Bosphorus;
And Rome, hard press'd on every side alike,

Shall find you omnipresent to destroy her.
This very moment order me to start,
All that detains you here urges my flight;
And, if this enterprise surpass my pow'rs,
Such hope forlorn befits my evil case.
Yes, I will go, too glad to end my woes
So soon—I will erase my mother's crime
That makes me blush, my sire, here at your knees,
Ashamed to know myself a son of hers;
Scarce all my blood can wash away that stain.
Only let me by death enhance your glory,
And Rome, the object of my grand despair,
Shall to the son of Mithridates offer
A worthy tomb.

MITHRIDATES (*rising*).

My son, let us not speak
Of her again. Your father is content,
He knows your zeal, nor will he have you face
Dangers that his affection will not share:
Nothing shall part us, you shall follow me.

And you, prepare yourself, Prince, to obey;
The ships are ready, I myself have order'd
The train and the equipment you require.
Arbates, charged to bring you to your bride,
Will let me know how you perform your duty.
Go; and, maintaining your ancestral honour,
In this embrace receive your sire's farewell.

PHARNACES.

Sir—

MITHRIDATES.

Let th' expression of my will suffice you.
Obey. It were superfluous to repeat it.

PHARNACES.

Sir, might it please you to accept my death,
None shall be found more eager to embrace it.
Let me fall fighting in your ranks before you.

MITHRIDATES.

I have commanded you to start directly,
And if you linger—Prince, you hear my voice,
Answer me not, or do it at your peril.

PHAENACES.

If you should hold a thousand deaths in prospect,
I could not seek a maiden whom I know not.
My life is in your hands.

MITHRIDATES.

Ha! As I thought!
You cannot go! I understand you, traitor!
I know what makes you shun this marriage. Here
You have a quarry you are loath to leave:
'Tis Monima detains you; guilty love
Moved you to tear her from your father's arms.
Neither the warmth with which you know I wooed her,
Nor yet my diadem that decks her brow,
Nor this retreat selected for her safety,
Nor fear of my just wrath had force to check you.
Was then your treacherous sympathy with Rome
Offence so venial in your father's eyes,
That this perfidious passion still was wanting
To render you the horror of my life?
Far from repentance, on your face I see
Confusion due to rage and disappointment.
You long already, from my hands escaping,
To sell me to the Romans and secure
My ruin. But to justice I'll defer
Departure. Ho there, Guards!

Scene 2.

MITHRIDATES, PHARNACES, XIPHARES, GUARDS.

MITHRIDATES.

Arrest the traitor !

Ay, him there, Pharnaces. Go : quit him not
Till you have lock'd him safely in the toy'r.

PHARNACES.

'Twere idle to assert me innocent.
Yes, it is true, my love deserves your hatred.
My love is hers ; you have been told the truth ;
But Xiphares has not reveal'd the whole.
What he has said is less than what he hides,
And this devoted son should have inform'd you
That he, long smitten with the self-same passion,
Loves the Queen also,—and is loved by her.

Scene 3.

MITHRIDATES, XIPHARES.

XIPHARES.

Sir, can you think me guilty of a scheme—

MITHRIDATES.

My son, I know your brother's villainy.
May Heav'n preserve me ever from suspecting
That you could make so cruel a return
For all my kindness, that a son so dear
Could have betray'd a father's trusting heart.
I'll not believe it. Go : far be the thought !
Henceforth be all my mind bent upon vengeance.

Scene 4.

MITHRIDATES.

I'll not believe it?—Vainly flattering hope!
You do believe it, wretched Mithridates!
Is Xiphares my rival? Does the Queen
Conspire with him, and dares she to deceive me?
On whatsoever side I turn mine eyes,
All hearts have lost their loyalty to me!
Friendless without, within my home betray'd!
Pharnaces, Monima, and thou, my son,
Thou too, whose virtue solaced my disgrace—
But know I not this Pharnaces a traitor?
How weak am I to trust his baffled fury,
Whom spite and envy arm against his brother,
Or whose despair, inventing idle tales,
To save himself would make all others guilty!
Nay, I'll believe him not, nor be too hasty,
But probe the truth. Yet where shall I begin?
Whose witness will convince me? By what proofs?—
Ha! Heav'n inspires me with a sudden thought.
I'll call the Queen. Yes, without going further,
I'll hear her, and rely upon her witness.
Love greedily believes what gives it pleasure.
If he has won her heart, none else so well
Can show it. Let me see which of the two
Her love will charge. They have deserved a snare
I scorn to use. 'Tis lawful to deceive
Deceivers, and to unmask treachery—
But here she comes: a skilful falsehood now
Shall mock her hopes and make her truth avow.

Scene 5.

MONIMA, MITHRIDATES.

MITHRIDATES

My eyes at last are open, and I own
The claims of justice! 'Twere a sorry gift
To charms so rare to offer you a hand
Burden'd with age and a long train of troubles.
Fortune and Victory have heretofore
With thirty crowns conceal'd my hoary head.
But it is so no longer; once a king,
I am a fugitive, old and disgraced.
My brow, despoil'd of all its royal honours,
Too plainly shows the ravages of time.
Besides all that, a thousand schemes engross
My care; you hear the shouts of troops prepared
To start forthwith; once more I man the vessels
That brought us. Nuptial rites would ill consort
With hurried flight, nor can I let you share
My shatter'd fortunes in this desp'rate quest.
But think no more of Pharnaces; for justice
Claims sacrifice on your part as on mine.
I will not suffer this rebellious son,
Whom I have banish'd from my sight for ever,
To own a heart which was denied to me,
And bring it into friendship with the Romans.
My throne is due to you; far from regretting
The gift, there will I place you ere I go,
If only you consent that one so dear
To me, a son worthy a father's love,
That Xiphares in short shall take my place,
Wed you, and wreak my vengeance on the traitor.

MONIMA.

Who! Xiphares, my lord!

MITHRIDATES.

Ay, Madam, he.

Whence comes this agitation at his name?

What leads you to object to choice so just?
Is it disdain that reason cannot quell?
He, I repeat it, is my second self,
Victorious in the field, a son who loves me,
By me beloved, the foe of Rome, the heir
Of my renown that will revive in him.
And, whatsoever pledge you may have taken,
'Tis only to his hands that I'll resign you.

MONIMA.

What say you? Gracious Heav'n! Can you approve—
Oh, why, my lord, why try me so severely?
Cease to torment a soul unfortunate.
I know that I was destined to be yours,
I know this very moment at the altar
The victim stands to seal our marriage bond.
Come.

MITHRIDATES.

I see clearly, do whate'er I may,
You fain would keep yourself for Pharnaces.
I find your scorn is as unjust as ever,
Passing from me to my unhappy son.

MONIMA.

I scorn him?

MITHRIDATES.

Let us speak of it no more.
Pursue the shameful flame that lures you on.
While with my son far from your sight I go
To the world's end, seeking a glorious death,
Stay here to share his brother's degradation,
And to the Romans sell a father's blood.
Come: can I better punish your disdain
Than by committing you to hands so vile?
No longer shall your honour be to me
Matter of moment, you shall be forgotten.
Come, Madam. I am going to unite you.

MONIMA.

Punish me rather with a thousand deaths!

MITHRIDATES.

Mere subterfuge ! 'Tis idle to resist.

MONIMA.

To what extremity am I reduced !
But after all I cannot think that you
Could force yourself so long to act a part.
Heav'n is my witness that I aim'd to please you,
And to its destiny my soul submitted. ^a
But if to any weakness I had yielded,
Had I been bound to fortify my heart
Against alarm, believe me, my good lord,
I ne'er had shed a tear for Pharnaces ;
The son whom you esteem, whose image lives
Within your heart, whose victories have curb'd
The insolence of Rome, your second self,
That Xiphares whom you would have me love—

MITHRIDATES.

You love him ?

MONIMA.

Had the Fates not made me yours,
To be his bride were happiness supreme.
Before this pledge of your affection reach'd me,
We loved each other. You change countenance !

MITHRIDATES.

No, no. It is enough. Go ; and I'll send him
To you. I must be busy, time is precious.
I see that you are willing to obey me ;
I am content.

MONIMA (*going away*).

Heav'n grant this be no trick !

Scene 6.

MITHRIDATES.

They love each other, I have been befool'd.
Ah! thou ungrateful son, thy death shall pay
For all. I know how thou has stol'n from me
My soldiers' hearts by virtues well assumed
And martial glory. But my stroke shall fall
Sure on the traitor; I will scatter far
The seeds of mutiny, forestall rebellion,
And keep no troops but such as I can trust.
But I must still dissimulate, nor go
Hence with a frown that may displeasure show.

ACT IV.

Scene 1.

MONIMA, PHÆDIMA.

MONIMA.

Oh, in the name of Heav'n, dear Phœdima,
Do what I wish, see what is going on,
And bring me word. My heart is ill at ease,
Torn by a thousand terrible suspicions.
Why tarries Xiphares? What holds him back,
Now, when his father's sanction crowns his vows?
His father said that he would send him hither—
But may he not have feign'd, finding it needful
To disavow the truth? While I disclosed
My inmost heart—Has Heav'n abandon'd me,
And suffer'd my unguarded love to bring
Upon my lover's head the King's resentment?
When thou, dear Prince, with passionate entreaty
Didst urge me to confess my cherish'd secret,
Full twenty times I cruelly refused,

And even punish'd thee for having torn
The veil aside ; yet when thy sire, perchance,
Distrusts thee, when thy very life's in danger,
I speak and, but too easily deceived,
Point out the fatal spot to pierce thy heart !

PHÆDIMA.

Nay, Madam, treat the King with less injustice ;
He is too great to stoop to tricks so mean.
What need was his to tread the paths of guile ?
Before him to the altar you were bound
Without a murmur. Would he slay a son
So fondly loved ? Nothing has pass'd to show
His promise false. He told you that a scheme
Momentous must to-morrow take him hence
Against his will ; this occupies his thoughts,
And, hastening his departure, on the shore
He orders all himself, and mans his ships,
While Xiphares accompanies his steps
Where'er he goes. Is this a rival's fury ?
What has he done to contradict his words ?

MONIMA.

Yet Pharnaces, arrested by his order,
Finds him a rival harsh and unrelenting.
Will Xiphares be treated with more favour ?

PHÆDIMA.

He punishes in him the friend of Rome ;
His just displeasure needs no other spur.

MONIMA.

I grant you right ; and, so far as I can,
Believe you. Grief grows calmer while you speak.
But Xiphares still comes not. Why is this ?

PHÆDIMA.

Lovers expect too much ! Fain would they have
All things give way to feed their fond desires !
Chafing against the smallest obstacle—

MONIMA.

Who could conceive this marvel, Phœdima?
After two years of sorrow—ah, you know
How sore a burden,—I can breathe once more!
Dear Prince, shall I indeed see thee mine own,
And, so far from endangering thy life,
May I admit a love so long resisted,
As consonant with duty and with virtue!
May I each day assure thee that I love thee!
Why comes he not?

Scene 2.

MONIMA, XIPHARES, PHÆDIMA.

MONIMA.

Of you, Sir, I was speaking,
And longing in my heart to see you here,
To tell you—

XIPHARES.

I must now bid you farewell!

MONIMA.

Farewell?

XIPHARES.

Yes, Madam, and for all my life.

MONIMA.

What say you? I was told—I've been betray'd!

XIPHARES.

Madam, I know not what insidious foe
Has sought my ruin, and betray'd our secrets;
But now the King, whom Pharnaces in vain
Tried to inflame against us, knows our hearts.
He hides his purpose under mock caresses;
But I, brought up as I have been beside him

And grown familiar with his every mood,
Have read approaching vengeance in his looks.
He sends away in haste all whom my woes
Might rouse to indignation and revolt.
I see how forced and false are all his favours.
Arbates by a single word confirm'd
My dread, and thus with tearful eyes address'd me : —
"Save yourself, fly," said he, "for all is known."
This made me shudder at the thought of danger
To you ; 'tis that concern which brings me hither,
I fear what you may do, and on my knees
Entreat you to have pity on yourself.
Your life is in the power of one whose rage
Too seldom spares the blood he holds most dear ;
I dare not tell you to what cruelty
The jealousy of Mithridates oft
Impels him. It may be that I alone
Incur his wrath, and he will pardon you.
Deign to appease him, in the name of Heav'n ;
Do not provoke him by a fresh refusal.
The less you love him, strive the more to win
His favour, hide your feelings, and remember
He is my father. Be content to live,
And leave my woe this solace, that your tears
Are all that I have cost you.

MONIMA.

Ah ! 'tis I

Have ruin'd you !

XIPHARES.

My noble Monima,
Blame not your kindness for the ills that crush me.
I am a wretch whom evil fate pursues,
'Tis she who robs me of my father's love,
Makes him my rival, made my mother rise
Against him, and has roused a secret foe
At this disastrous moment to betray us.

MONIMA.

What ! Is the traitor still to you unknown ?

XIPHARES.

To add to my distress, I know him not.
Happy were I if, ere my own destruction,
I might transfix that false and treacherous heart!

MONIMA.

Then from my lips learn who this monster is.
It needs not to search far to find your foe:
Let no regard restrain you, strike, my lord:
The guilt is mine; 'tis me you have to punish.

XIPHARES.

You!

MONIMA.

With what depths of cunning cruelty
He took my tender feelings by surprise!
How well did he affect to love you truly!
So pleased he seem'd that I should be your bride,
Who would have thought—but no, love should have been
More cautious than to trust to specious falsehood.
The gods, whose guidance I have follow'd ill,
Thrice warn'd me secretly to hold my peace.
I should have still kept silence, and maintain'd—
Yes; it is I have been your evil fate;
I should have dreaded that his gifts were poison'd;
And, should you pardon me, I shall become
My own tormentor.

XIPHARES.

Was it then your love
Exposed me to this storm? Springs bitterness
From source so sweet, and has excess of fondness
Betray'd our secret? To have made me happy
Needs no excuse. What would I more? I die,
Faithful and proud. Another fate invites
You to the throne; no more resist that summons;
Wed Mithridates, and consent to reign.

MONIMA.

What! Do you ask me to espouse a savage
• Whose hateful love parts you and me for ever?

XIPHARES.

Remember you are pledged to be his bride
This morning, and to see me nevermore.

MONIMA.

Ah, then I knew not all his cruelty.
What! shall I lend my sanction to his fury,
And, after I have seen his dagger pierce you,
Follow a tyrant to the marriage altar,
And in a hand yet reeking with your blood
Place mine—alas, the hand you loved to hold?
Go, seek some shelter from your father's rage,
Nor in vain efforts to persuade me lose
The precious moments here; the gods will teach me
What part to play. If he surprised you now—
I hear a step. Quick, ere it be too late!
And live in patience till you learn my fate!

Scene 3.

MONIMA. PHÆDIMA.

PHÆDIMA.

Oh, what a risk, dear Madam, did he run!
It is the King!

MONIMA.

Go, help him to make good
His exit. Leave him not, make him secure
His safety without learning what befalls me.

Scene 4.

MITHRIDATES, MONIMA.

MITHRIDATES.

Come, Madam, come, I have a secret reason
For hastening my departure from this place.

While my devoted troops embark once more,
Ready to follow me where'er I go,
Come, at the altar be my promise seal'd,
Let wedlock in eternal bonds unite us.

MONIMA.

Us, Sire?

MITHRIDATES.

You surely dare not hesitate.

MONIMA.

Did you not bid me cease to think of it?

MITHRIDATES.

I had my reasons then; forget it, Madam.
Think only now of answering my flame.
Your heart, remember, is my property.

MONIMA.

Why then, Sire, did you give it back to me?

MITHRIDATES.

What! still enamour'd of my faithless son?
You could not think—

MONIMA.

Have you deceived me then?

MITHRIDATES.

It well becomes a traitress to talk thus,
Who, nursing in her heart illicit loves,
When I was raising her to glory's height,
The blackest treason had prepared for me!
Have you forgotten, false, ungrateful woman,
Worse than the Romans, my sworn enemies,
From what exalted rank I dared to stoop,
To offer you a throne, little expected?
See me not as I am, defeated, hunted—
But as I was, victorious and renown'd.

Think how in Ephesus I you preferr'd
To all the daughters of a hundred kings,
And, for your sake neglecting their alliance,
Laid at your feet innumerable realms.
Ah, if the vision of another love
Made you insensible to gifts so splendid,
Why did you leave your home to find a husband
You hated, keeping silence till to-day?
Did you postpone confession so unwelcome
Till Fate had robb'd me of all other treasure,
Till, overwhelm'd beneath a flood of countless evils,
I had no hope of happiness but you?
And now, when I am willing to forgive
The grievous wrong and bury its remembrance,
Dare you to bring the past before my eyes
Again, accusing him whom you have injured?
I see infatuation for a traitor
Flatters your hopes. Gods! How ye try my patience!
What was the secret charm that check'd a wrath
So prompt to punish with severity?
Seize the brief moment that my love affords you:
Come, this shall be my last appeal, nor draw
Superfluous perils on your head for one
Whom you shall never see again, a son
Who scorns me. Boast not of your faith to him;
'Tis due to me. Let him be lost to mind
As well as sight. And henceforth by your sense
Of gratitude deserve this proffer'd pardon.

MONIMA.

My lord, not unremember'd is the bounty
That should have claim'd my loyallest obedience;
Whatever rank my ancestors attain'd
Of yore, their distant glory dazzled not
My eyes, that recognise how far beneath
So glorious a bridegroom I was born;
And, in despite of early predilection
For Xiphæres, the noblest of mankind
After yourself, when once this diadem
My brow adorn'd, him and my former love
Did I renounce. For both agreed to make

The sacrifice. By my command he left me.
The secret flame was dying in my breast,
Nor did my lot seem one to be deplored,
Since, at the cost of vows once fondly cherish'd,
I could bring happiness to such a hero.
'Twas you, my lord, 'twas you yourself who tore
The bond between us, set me free again:
That fatal love which I had crush'd and conquer'd,
The flame I deem'd extinguish'd and forgotten
When he who kindled it was gone for ever,
Your wiles detected; and I cannot now
Disown what I confess'd; you cannot raze
Its memory; the shame of that avowal,
To which you forced me, will abide for ever
Present before my mind, and I should think
That you were always of my faith uncertain.
The grave itself to me were less abhorrent
Than marriage bed shared with a spouse who took
Cruel advantage of my simple trust,
And, to destroy my peace for ever, fann'd
A flame that fired my cheek for other love
Than his.

MITHRIDATES.

Is this your answer then? Do you
Reject the honour I would fain confer?
Ponder it well, while yet the choice is yours.

MONIMA.

No, Sire. 'Tis vain to work upon my fears.
I know you; nor am ignorant what woes
I for myself prepare; I see them all;
But I'm resolved, and naught can shake my purpose.
Judge for yourself, since thus I dare to speak,
And in my zeal forget that modesty
By which till now I ever curb'd my tongue.
You from my hand unwitting took the knife
To stab a son whose secret I betray'd,
A son whose passion bore no stain of guilt;
And, though he only fear'd to lose your love,
His death must follow. Faith or love from me

Shall ne'er reward such crooked cruelty.
Let this decide your action. Slay a rebel ;
You have me in your pow'r, spare not to use it ;
You can command, and I can wait the sentence.
I beg but one thing ere I take my leave,
(Justice demands this tribute to desert,)
Believe me the sole traitor, no accomplice
Have I, and full success would crown your wishes,
Did I but heed the wishes of your son.

Scene 5.

MITHRIDATES.

She leaves me ! And in silence like a coward
I seem to sanction her audacious flight !
My heart is almost ready to pronounce
Myself too cruel, and to take her side !
Who am I ? Is this Monima ? Am I
No longer Mithridates ? Rage returns :
No lingering love shall make me pardon her.
Three wretched victims shall appease my fury
At once, ere I set sail with Rome before me :
This sacrifice shall render Heav'n propitious.
'Tis right, 'tis easy ; all the most seditious
Who might have help'd them have been far removed.
No matter which I love or which I hate,
First Xiphares himself shall meet his fate.

What am I saying ? These are words of madness !
Who is it thou wilt sacrifice ? Thy son,
The dread of Rome, who may avenge his sire !
Why should I shed blood to myself so precious ?
Ah ! fallen as I am and brought so low,
Find I those friends too many who are left me ?
Nay, let me rather foster his affection ;
I need a sword of vengeance, not a mistress.
Since I must lose her, would it not be better
To yield her to this son whose life I value ?
Ay, let me give her up !

A vain attempt,

That only shows how feeble is the heart
Which seeks its own deception. Still inflamed,
It will not cease—

Ah! hers is guilt beyond
Pardon. But pity checks my timid hand.
Have I not punish'd others who were found
Less faithless? O my Monima! My son!
O futile wrath! What triumph, Rome, were thine,
If thou should'st hear the tidings of my shame,
And how conflicting feelings thus unman me!

What pains I took, fearing domestic treason,
To arm my life against all kinds of poison!
By long and careful study I have learn'd
How best to neutralize their fatal pow'r.
Ah! 't would have been a wiser, happier course,
Forestalling danger from th' assaults of love,
To fortify a heart, already frozen
By age, 'gainst passion's hot envenom'd cup!
How shall I 'scape these toils that close around me?

Scene 6.

MITHRIDATES, ARBATES.

ARBATES.

Sire, all your troops refuse to go, detain'd
By Pharnaces, who has to them reveal'd
That for fresh warfare you are bound for Rome.

MITHRIDATES.

What! Pharnaces!

ARBATES.

His guards he first seduced,
And the mere name of Rome alarms the boldest.
A thousand frightful dangers they imagine:
Some in their vehemence embrace the shore,
Others, who were aboard, plunge in the waves,
Or flash their weapons in the sailors' eyes.
•Confusion reigns, our orders disregarded;

Peace they demand, and talk of self surrender.
And Pharnaces, who flatters all their wishes,
Heads them, and offers in the name of Rome ,
The peace they ask.

MITHRIDATES.

Traitor! Let Xiphares
Be summon'd quickly; let him follow me,
And lend me succour.

ARBATES.

What he means I know not,
But to the port he suddenly has flown,
And, follow'd by a band of trusty friends,
They say he has been seen among the rebels.
And that is all I know.

MITHRIDATES.

What news is this!
Traitors! Too long has vengeance been delay'd!
I fear them not; despite their insolence,
My presence will put down this mutiny.
Ah! let me only see them, and before
Their eyes this hand shall slay two impious sons.

Scene 7.

MITHRIDATES, ARBATES, ARCAS.

ARCAS.

Sire, all is lost! The rebels, Pharnaces,
The Romans, all are crowding thick around us.

MITHRIDATES.

The Romans!

ARCAS.

Ay, the shore is full of them,
And you will be beleaguerc'd here full soon.

MITHRIDATES.

Hence, then, in Heav'n's name!

(To MONIMA.)

Hear me, perjured Princess,
No profit shall you reap from my misfortune!

A C T V.

Scene 1.

MONIMA, PHÆDIMA.

PHÆDIMA.

Whither, dear Madam, haste you? What blind passion
Makes you lay impious hands upon yourself?
What! You have tried with criminal intent
To desecrate this sacred diadem!
See how kind Heav'n, more merciful than you,
This fatal noose has broken in your hands!

MONIMA.

Why will you obstinately thwart my wishes?
I long to die. Why would you have me live?
My Xiphares is dead. The King's despair
Looks for naught better than assured destruction.
What fruit expect you from your rude presumption?
Mean you to give me up to Pharnaces?

PHÆDIMA.

Ah! wait at least till tidings, of whose truth
We cannot doubt, confirm his brother's death.
May it not be that, in the wild confusion
Of which we hear, men's eyes have been deceived?
At first, you know, a scandalous report
Ranged Xiphares upon the rebels' side;

And now they tell us these same mutineers
In cruel rage have turn'd their arms against him.
One tale confutes the other. Deign to listen—

MONIMA.

Nay, Xiphares is dead, I cannot doubt it :
Nor has th' event belied my expectation.
E'en if the fatal news had fail'd to reach me,
His death were no less sure ; I know his courage,
And how his name is hateful to the Romans.
Long have they thirsted for such noble blood.
Rome's triumph now, alas, is but too certain !
What enemy opposed his hand to theirs ?
Wretch that I am, I dare not shift the blame
On others. Monima, to thee he owes
His woful fate ; open thine eyes and see
Thy guilt in all his sufferings, thou hast arm'd
A host against his life. How could he 'scape
So many blows ? The Romans and his brother
Were not enough, I to his father's wrath
Exposed him, I—the fatal torch of discord,
The Fury that Rome's demon bred and nursed
To aid them—I it was who fann'd the fire
Of mutual jealousy to conflagration.
Yet do I live, and wait till Pharnaces,
Bespatter'd with their blood, comes in the train
Of Roman victors, and before mine eyes
Displays his savage joy. Death to despair
Opens more ways than one : your cruel kindness
In vain would bar swift passage to the tomb ;
E'en in your arms I shall not miss the goal.
Thou fatal band, ill-omen'd diadem,
The instrument and witness of my woes,
A thousand times bedew'd with scalding tears,
Could'st thou not do me this poor piece of service,
To rid me of my life and all its anguish ?
Go, object hateful to my weary eyes !
Some other instrument will aid me better.
Perish the day, curst be the fatal hand
That bound thee first upon this aching brow !

PHÆDIMA.

See, Arcas comes ! Heav'n grant that he appears
With tidings which may banish all your fears !

Scene 2.

MONIMA, PHÆDIMA, ARCAS.

" MONIMA.

Say, is all over ? and has Pharnaces—

ARCAS.

Ask me not what has happen'd. I am charged
With sterner duty, Madam, and this poison,
Sent by the King, tells you his will and pleasure.

PHÆDIMA.

Unhappy Princess !

MONIMA.

O surpassing joy !
Give it me, Arcas. Tell the King who sends it,
Of all the gifts his bounty has bestow'd
This is the one most welcome, most desired.

I breathe at last with freedom, saved by Heav'n
From those whose irksome care forced me to live.
For once he leaves me mistress of my fate,
Nor interferes to check me in my choice.

PHÆDIMA.

Alas !

MONIMA.

Repress your cries, this happy moment
Must not be troubled with unworthy tears.
Your love, my Phædima, had better cause
To weep, when I was honour'd with a title
Pregnant with woe, when, torn from my sweet home
They dragg'd your mistress to this savage clime.

Now to that happy land return, and should
The name of Monima be there remember'd,
Say what you see, tell the sad history
Of all my glory, faithful Phœdima.

And thou, with whom, parted by envious Fate
For ever from a heart that held thee dear,
I may not ask even to share the tomb
To which I go, receive this sacrifice,
Heroic soul; and may this poison now
Be my atonement for my lover's blood!

Scene 3.

MONIMA, ARBATES, PHŒDIMA, ARCAS.

ARBATES.

Stop! Stop!

ARCAS.

What is it that you do, Arbates?

ARBATES.

Stop! I'm the bearer of the King's command.

MONIMA.

Ah! leave me—

ARBATES (*throwing down the poison*).

Cease, I tell you. Suffer me
To execute the pleasure of the King.
Live, Madam. Haste to Mithridates, Arcas;
Tell him success has crown'd my zealous service.

Scene 4.

MONIMA, ARBATES, PHÆDIMA.

MONIMA.

Cruel Arbates, why prolong the woes
I suffer? Was my punishment too mild?
And does the King grudge me an end so sudden;
A single death too little to content him?

ARBATES.

You soon shall see him, and I feel assured
Your tears for him will mingle with mine own.

MONIMA.

What! Is the King—

ARBATES.

The King's last hour draws nigh,
His eyes will never see another sun.
I left him bleeding, borne upon a litter,
And, weeping, by his side went Xiphares.

MONIMA.

Great Heavens! Xiphares! Am I awake?
I tremble, and can scarce believe mine ears.
Is he yet living? Xiphares, for whom—

ARBATES.

He lives, with glory crown'd, with grief o'erwhelm'd.
The tidings of his death, here spread abroad,
Not you alone have needlessly alarm'd.
The Romans, crying out in all directions
The fatal news, chill'd ev'ry hopeful heart.

The King, himself deceived, shed bitter tears,
And, looking forward henceforth to defeat
As certain, by a rebel son hard press'd
Despairing of relief, and all but forced

To yield, and seeing, to increase his pangs,
The Roman eagle with his standards borne
Against him, to no higher aim aspired
Than to avoid the shame of a surrender
Into their hands alive. First he tried poisons,
Such as he knew most deadly in effect ;
He found them all harmless and impotent.
“ Vain help,” said he, “ too long with anxious care
This body have I strengthen’d to resist
All poisons, baffled by my own success.
Some aid more certain I must now attempt,
And seek a death more fatal to my foes.”
He speaks, and bids the palace gates be thrown
Wide open, in defiance of their numbers.
When they beheld those eyes whose noble fury
Had spread such frequent terror thro’ their ranks,
You might have seen them all fall back amazed,
Leaving wide interval ’tween us and them ;
While some, already struck with panic, ran
And sought a refuge in the ships that brought them.
But, reassured—oh Heav’n’s!—by Pharnaces,
And shame within their hearts awakening valour,
They take fresh courage, they attack the King,
Round whom I rallied a small band of heroes.
Who could relate what feats incredible,
While flash’d his sword as fiercely as his eyes,
His arm perform’d in this the closing scene
That brought him to the pinnacle of glory ?
Weary at last, cover’d with blood and dust,
He stood at bay behind a wall of corpses.
Another force advanced in arms against us ;
The Romans all, ceasing to fight elsewhere,
Join’d with united strength to overwhelm him.
Then said he :—“ Dear Arbates, ’tis enough ;
My fury has outrun my failing pow’rs.
Yet never will I yield myself alive.”
So saying in his breast he plunged his sword ;
But Fate refused to free his mighty soul,
And in my arms with gaping wound he lay
Exhausted, chafing at death’s slow approach,
And vex’d that life still linger’d in his veins ;

He could not speak, but raised his heavy hand,
And laid it on his heart, as if to ask
A surer stroke from me, to make an end.
While I, possess'd with overmastering grief,
Was minded rather to destroy myself,
With loud and sudden shouts the air was rent,
And I beheld a sight most marvellous.
From ev'ry quarter fled routed and vanquish'd
The Romans to their ships, with Pharnaces;
And drawing near my dazzled eyes discern'd
Victorious Xiphares in hot pursuit.

MONIMA.

Oh, Heav'n is just!

ARBATES.

The faithful Xiphares
Had by his brother's orders been surrounded
When in the thickest of the fray, but he
After hard fighting had at last escaped
The rebels and regain'd his little band.
E'en in the jaws of death, with keen delight
Across a thousand corpses had he hewn
His way victorious to his father's side.
Alas! What horror to that joy succeeded
Lifeless he would have fallen at his feet,
Had we not rush'd opposing his despair.
The dying King at that sad moment fix'd
His eye on me, and said with feeble voice:—
“Run, if there yet is time, and save the Queen!”
My fears aroused for you, for Xiphares,
Suspecting secret orders had been giv'n,
All weary as I was, alarm and zeal
Inspired fresh strength and to my feet lent wings;
And some relief it is, 'mid all our woe,
Thus to have warded off this latest blow.

MONIMA.

Ah me! At this sad end of all his greatness
My horror-stricken heart is thrill'd with pity.
I would to Heav'n that I had had no share

In such a consummation of disaster,
 And free from self-accusing thoughts might weep
 Merely to witness woe so terrible!
 He comes. Ah! What a piteous sight appears,
 The father dying, and the son in tears!

Scene 5.

MITHRIDATES, MONIMA, XIPHARES, ARBATES, PHÆDIMA,
 ARCAS, GUARDS (*supporting MITHRIDATES*).

MONIMA.

Alas, my lord! How dreadful is your fate!

MITHRIDATES.

Cease, and let both of you restrain your tears.

(*Pointing to XIPHARES.*)

From his devotion and your tenderness
 I look for other feelings than compassion.
 My glory rather claims your admiration,
 Sully it not with sighs and lamentation.

As far as in me lay, I have avenged
 The world, and death alone has balk'd my efforts
 To strike a mortal blow at tyranny.
 The enemy of Rome, I spurn'd her yoke,
 And in the roll of those heroic names
 Whose hatred has opposed her, mine will stand
 Pre-eminent for dear-bought victories
 That fill her annals with unlucky days.
 'Twas not in Heav'n's decrees that I should die
 Amidst the ashes and the wreck of Rome:
 But my last moments by this thought are soothed,
 Full many a foe has fallen ere I fell,
 Full deeply have I dyed my hands with blood,
 And I have seen the Romans fly ere death
 Darkens my sight. To Xiphares, my son,
 I owe this boon; he spares my dying eyes
 Their hateful presence. To repay this service

My glorious empire in its palmiest days
Were not enough; and now for throne and sceptre
I have but you. Let me present that gift;
And all the love which for myself I claim'd
I ask you to bestow on Xiphares.

MONIMA.

Live, my dear lord, for the world's happiness,
Live for her liberty which rests on you
Alone, for triumph o'er your vanquish'd foes,
For vengeance—

MITHRIDATES.

Madam, I have done with life.
My son, secure your safety, nor attempt
Resistance against numbers so immense.
Soon will the Romans, goaded on by shame,
Return, and like a flood sweep all before them.
Waste not the precious moments their retreat
Affords, in vain devotion at my tomb.
So many lifeless Romans lying round me
Are a sufficient tribute to my ashes.
Your name and person for a time conceal;
Go, and reserve yourself—

XIPHARES.

How can I fly
Ere Pharnaces is punish'd? Let me curb
The pride of Rome—

MITHRIDATES.

Nay, I command you hence.
Sooner or later Pharnaces must perish:
Trust to the Romans for his recompense.
But strength is ebbing fast; I feel that life
Is all but ended.—Come, my son, come nearer,
And in a last embrace, full of sweet comfort,
Receive the parting soul of Mithridates.

MONIMA.

He dies !

XIPHARES.

In grief let us united be
And search for vengeance over earth and sea !

I P H I G E N I A .

1674.

INTRODUCTION TO IPHIGENIA.

RACINE'S version of the time-honoured story of Iphigenia was acted for the first time in 1674. The model upon which it is shaped is the "Iphigenia in Aulis" of his favourite Euripides, but the French poet has heightened the romantic interest and complicated the plot by the important part which Eriphyle is made to play, a character which he derived from Pausanias and other writers, though her jealousy of Iphigenia, her treachery, and suicide, are due to his own invention. According to Æschylus and Sophocles the daughter of Agamemnon was actually slain at Aulis; and the graphic description of Lucretius which embodies this view of the catastrophe ("De Rerum Naturâ" lib. i. 85, etc.) has furnished Racine with one touch at least of exquisite pathos:—

"It was I
Who call'd thee first by the dear name of father."
(Act iv. scene 4.)

According to Euripides a fawn was substituted for the maiden by divine interposition at the last moment, and Iphigenia herself was spirited away in a cloud to serve as priestess at the shrine of Artemis (Diana) among the Tauri, the savage inhabitants of what is now the Crimea. Ovid in his "Metamorphoses" (lib. xii. 31, etc.) adopts this myth, and the genius of Goethe has presented it afresh to the modern world in a drama which bears as close a relation to the "Iphigenia in Tauris" of Euripides, as this play does to the "Iphigenia in Aulide." The tradition that Racine has followed introduces another Iphigenia, a daughter of Helen by Theseus, as the actual victim. How far he has succeeded in disarming our sympathy with Eriphyle is a matter that admits of dispute, but there is at least a dramatic justice in representing her destruction as the result of her own treachery.

CHARACTERS.

AGAMEMNON.

ACHILLES.

ULYSSES.

CLYTÆMNESTRA, *Wife of Agamemnon.*

IPHIGENIA, *Daughter of Agamemnon.*

ERIPHYLE, *Daughter of Helen and of Theseus.*

ARCAS,

EURYBATIS, } *Servants of Agamemnon.*

ÆGINA, *Attendant of Clytæmnestra.*

DORIS, *Friend of Eriphyle.*

GUARDS.

The scene is laid at Aulis, in the tent of Agamemnon.

IPHIGENIA.

ACT I.

Scene 1.

AGAMEMNON, ARCAS.

AGAMEMNON.

Ay, it is Agamemnon, 'tis thy King
That wakes thee; his the voice that strikes thine ear.

ARCAS.

Is't thou indeed, my lord? What grave concern
Has made thee leave thy couch before the dawn?
A feeble light scarce lets me see thy face,
No eyes but ours are open yet in Aulis.
Hast thou caught any sound of rising winds?
And can it be that Heav'n has heard our pray'r
This night? Nay, all are sleeping,—winds and waves
As sleeps the host.

AGAMEMNON.

Happy the man content
With humble fortune, free from the proud yoke
'Neath which I bow, who lives a life obscure,
Thanks to kind Heav'n!

• ARCAS.

How long, my lord, hast thou
Thought thus? What secret injury has work'd
This hatred and contempt of all the honours
• That Heav'n's rich bounty has on thee bestow'd?

Blest as king, sire, and husband, son and heir
 Of Atreus, the most favour'd land in Greece
 Is thine, and thou canst boast kinship with Jove
 Both by direct descent as well as marriage ;
 And young Achilles now, to whom the gods
 Promise such fame by all their oracles,
 Sues for thy daughter's hand, and at the flames
 Of burning Troy would light the nuptial torch.
 What glory, Sire, what triumphs can be match'd
 With this grand sight display'd along these shores ;
 A thousand vessels and a score of kings,
 All waiting here but for the winds to sail
 'Neath thy command? 'Tis true this tedious calm
 Delays thy conquests, and, for three months chain'd,
 The winds have block'd thy course to Troy too long.
 Supremely honour'd, thou art yet a mortal ;
 Nor has thy life from Fortune's shifting breeze
 Been promised happiness without alloy.
 Soon—

But what troubles, in that letter traced,
 Force from thine eyes, my lord, a burst of tears ?
 Is thine Orestes doom'd in infancy
 To death ? For Clytæmnestra dost thou weep,
 Or for Iphigenia ? Prithee, tell me
 What is writ there.

AGAMEMNON.

Thou shalt not die ; no, never
 Will I consent.

ARCAS.

My lord !

AGAMEMNON.

Thou seest my grief,
 Learn thou its cause, and judge if I can rest.
 Thou dost remember when, in Aulis gather'd,
 Our ships seem'd summon'd by the winds to sea :
 Our sails unfurl'd, a thousand cries of joy
 Already carried threats to distant Troy ;
 When, lo, a sudden marvel hush'd our shouts,

The favouring breeze deserted us in port.
 In vain the oars smote the unruffled deep,
 We were constrain'd to stop the fruitless toil.
 That wondrous portent made me turn mine eyes
 Toward the goddess who is worshipp'd here.
 With Menelaus, Nestor, and Ulysses,
 I sought her shrine and offer'd secret victims.
 What was her answer! Ah, with what distress
 I heard these awful words from Calchas' lips:—

- “The force we arm to conquer Troy is vain,
 Unless with rites of sacrifice and pray'r
 Upon Diana's altar here be slain
 A maid of Helen's blood, divinely fair;
 • T' obtain the welcome wind that Heav'n denies,
 'Tis needful that Iphigenia dies.”

ARCAS.

Thy daughter!

AGAMEMNON.

Thou may'st fancy how I felt
 Astonishment that seem'd to freeze my blood.
 Speechless I stood, while my sole utterance
 Was in a thousand choking sighs express'd;
 Then cursed the gods, and, without hearing more,
 Vow'd, on their altars, I would disobey them.
 Ah! would that I had trusted love's alarm,
 And instantly disbanded all the host!
 Ulysses seem'd content with what I wish'd,
 Nor check'd the torrent of my angry words.
 But soon, returning to his cruel wiles,
 He set before me honour and the claims
 Of country, kings and people to my sway
 Subject, and sov'reignty o'er Asia promised
 To Greece; how could I sacrifice, he ask'd,
 The State to save a daughter, and go home
 Disgraced for ever. I confess with shame,
 My pow'r had yet some charm, and I was full
 Of pride; those sounding titles, King of kings,
 • Leader of Greece, tickled my swelling heart.
 To crown my trouble, ev'ry night the gods,

Oft as light slumber gave me rest from care,
 Avenged their cruel altars, and reproach'd
 My sacrilegious pity, brandishing
 The lightning's bolts before my dazzled eyes,
 With arm already raised as if to punish
 My fault. I yielded, conquer'd by Ulysses,
 And with wet eyes order'd my daughter's death.
 But from a mother's arms she must be torn :
 I had to have recourse to base deceit.
 Achilles loved her, and I wrote to Argos,
 As if at his request, saying that he,
 Eager to start with us, wish'd for her presence,
 That he might wed her ere we sail'd for Troy.

ARCAS.

Fearest thou not Achilles, quick in quarrel?
 Dost think this hero, arm'd by love and reason,
 Will calmly let his name be thus abused
 To expedite her murder, and be dumb
 Seeing his loved one slain before his eyes?

AGAMEMNON.

Achilles was not here ; his father Peleus,
 Fearing the efforts of a neighbouring foe,
 Had, as thou wilt remember, call'd him from us,
 And there was ev'ry cause to think this war
 Would have detain'd him longer than it did.
 But who can stop that torrent in its course?
 Achilles goes to fight, and wins forthwith ;
 The victor, pressing on the heels of Fame,
 Arrived last night, and now is in the camp.
 Yet stronger motives paralyze mine arm :
 My daughter, who is hastening to her death,
 Far from suspecting such a dreadful sentence,
 Is pleased, perchance, her father is so kind ;
 My daughter—name that in itself is sacred,—
 So near in blood, so young ! Yet not for that
 I mourn, but for her virtues and the love
 Between us,—tenderness in me, in her
 A piety that nothing can outweigh,
 For which I promised a more meet return.

Can I believe thy justice, gracious Heav'n,
Approves this dark and savage sacrifice?
Thine oracles but put me to a test,
And thou thyself would'st punish my obedience.
Arcas, to thee this private task I trust;
Herein display thy prudence and thy zeal.
The Queen, who found thee faithful when at Sparta,
Has placed thee near my person. Take this letter,
And go to meet the Queen without delay,
Post-haste thy course pursuing tow'rd Mycenæ;
Whom when thou seest, forbid her to advance,
Giving to her this letter I have written.
Beware thou stray not; take a trusty guide.
If once my daughter dear sets foot in Aulis,
Her life is lost; Calchas, who waits her here,
Will with a voice from Heaven drown our cries,
The voice of angry gods, to which, alarm'd,
The Greeks will hearken and to that alone;
'Those too whose proud ambition loathes my glory
Will reassert their claims with fresh intrigues,
Rob me of pow'r offensive in their eyes—
Go, save her from my weak irresolution.
But prithee let not zeal outrun discretion,
Give her no inkling of my wretched secret;
But, still deceived, let not my daughter know
The danger whereunto I had exposed her;
Spare me the outcry of an angry mother,
And with thy voice confirm what I have written.
To send the daughter and the mother home,
I tell them that Achilles' mind is changed,
And that he wishes to postpone this marriage,
For which he was so keen, till his return.
Add that the secret of this sudden coldness
Is thought to lie with fair young Eriphyle,
Whom he himself from Lesbos brought, a captive,
And who is kept at Argos with my daughter.
That is enough to say, and on all else
Be silent.

See how grows the light of day;
I hear a sound of voices. 'Tis Achilles.
Go. And—good Heav'ns—Ulysses follows him!

Scene 2.

AGAMEMNON, ACHILLES, ULYSSES.

AGAMEMNON.

Prince, can it be with such a rapid course
That victory has brought thee back to Aulis?
Are these the first flights of an unfledged valour?
What triumphs will succeed such grand exploits!
All Thessaly reduced to peace, and conquest
Of Lesbos made while waiting our departure,
These would be trophies of eternal glory
To any other, but to thee the sport
Of idle moments.

ACHILLES.

Sir, my slight successes
Are too much praised. May Heav'n that now detains us,
Soon show a nobler field to rouse the heart
That fain would prove itself worthy of prize
So rare as that thou off'rest. But, my lord,
Am I to trust a rumour that I hear
With joy? Dost deign so to promote my wishes?
Am I so soon the happiest of mortals?
'Tis said Iphigenia comes to Aulis,
And soon our fortunes will be link'd together.

AGAMEMNON.

My daughter? Who has told thee she comes hither?

ACHILLES.

What is there to astonish thee in this?

AGAMEMNON (*aside to ULYSSES*).

Heav'ns! Can my fatal stratagem have reach'd
His ears!

ULYSSES.

The King's astonishment is just.
Dost thou forget how dark is all around us?

Nay, by the gods, this is no time for weddings !
While idly float our vessels, from the sea
Shut out, our forces wasting, and all Greece
Perturb'd, when, to avert the wrath of Heav'n,
We may be call'd on to spill blood most precious,
Achilles thinks of love and love alone !
Will he so rudely flout the general fear ?
And shall the Grecian Leader so provoke
The Fates as here and now to celebrate
A marriage feast ? Ah, is it thus thy soul
With patriotic fervour shares the woe
Of Greece ?

ACHILLES.

Which loves her more, thou or myself,
Our deeds shall prove on the wide plains of Troy :
Till then I leave thee to display thy zeal,
Nor will I interrupt thy pious prayers
On her behalf. With victims load the altars,
Thyself consult the entrails, and inquire
Why Æolus imprisons all the winds :
But I, resigning all such cares to Calchas,
Must crave thy kind permission to despatch
A marriage inoffensive to the gods.
But thirst for glory will not let me rest,
Soon on this strand will I rejoin the Greeks ;
'Twould vex me sorely if another foot
Than mine should first land on the Trojan shore.

AGAMEMNON.

Oh, why does Heav'n with secret envy stirr'd,
Close all approach to Asia 'gainst such heroes ?
Have I beheld so noble a display
Of zeal, but to return more sick at heart ?

ULYSSES.

Gods ! How is this ?

ACHILLES

What dost thou dare to say ?

AGAMEMNON.

That each and all, brave prince, must hence retire ;
That, lured too long by hopes that have deceived us,
We vainly wait for winds that will not come.
Heav'n shelters Troy, and signifies its wrath
By supernatural obstacles that bar
Our passage thither.

ACHILLES.

By what signs has Heav'n
Declared its wrath ?

AGAMEMNON.

Thou knowest thine own fate
Predicted by the gods,—forgive my freedom.
To thee have they assigned great Ilium's fall ;
But, as the price of such a glorious conquest,
Thy tomb is mark'd out on the plains of Troy ;
We know thy life, that else were long and happy,
Is destined there to perish in its prime.

ACHILLES.

Shall then so many kings, met to avenge
Thee and thine house, turn home disgraced and shamed
For ever ? And shall Paris, in his love
Triumphant, keep unharm'd thy consort's sister ?

AGAMEMNON.

Has not thy valour, prince, outstripping ours,
Sufficiently avenged our wounded honour ?
Unhappy Lesbos, by thine hands laid waste,
Strikes terror into all th' Ægean isles :
Troy has beheld the flames, and to her ports
The waves have roll'd charr'd beams and mangled corpses.
Nay more,—the Trojans weep another Helen,
Whom to Mycenæ thou hast sent a captive :
For 'tis in vain to keep that birth a secret
Which pride and beauty in each glance betray ;
Her very silence marks nobility,
And tells us her illustrious origin.

ACHILLES.

No, no, all this is plausible evasion :
Dim in far distance are the secrets known
To Heav'n. Shall I be daunted by vain threats,
And shun the path of honour in thy track ?
The Fates, 'tis true, when to a mortal's couch
My mother came, warn'd her my choice would lie
Between a life long and inglorious,
Or else an early death with fame to follow.
But, since I soon or late must reach the tomb,
Shall I, a useless burden on the earth,
And chary of the blood a goddess gave,
Wait with my father for obscure old age,
And, scorning glory, leave behind no name
To outlive death ? Away with obstacles
Unworthy ! Honour speaks, it is enough ;
That is my oracle. The gods command
Our span of life, but in our own hand rests
Our glory. Why should we torment ourselves
With what belongs to Heaven ? Be it ours
To rival the Immortals, and, let fate
Act as it will, embrace the course that leads
To destinies as mighty as their own.
That goal is Troy, and, warn me as they may,
I ask no other boon than winds to waft
Me thither ; and tho' I alone should wage
This war, Patroclus and myself will wreak
Your vengeance. But not so, to thee is giv'n
The task, I only crave a follower's place.
No more I urge approval of the passion
Which for a time would part me from these shores ;
That very love, careful of thy renown,
Prompts me to stay, and by a firm example
Encourage all the army, nor consents
To leave thee to be sway'd by timid counsels.

Scene 3.

AGAMEMNON, ULYSSES.

ULYSSES.

You hear, my lord : whatever price it cost,
He is resolved to speed his course to Troy.
We fear'd his love ; and, happily mistaken,
To-day he arms our hands against himself.

AGAMEMNON.

Alas !

ULYSSES.

What must I deem this sigh portends ?
Is it a protest of reluctant nature ?
And has a single night sufficed to shake
Your purpose ? Did your heart speak in the words
Just heard ? Think well : you owe to Greece your daughter,
Your word is pledged to us, and on that promise
Calchas relying to the Greeks foretells
The sure return of favourable winds.
If the event conflicts with his prediction,
Think you that Calchas can continue silent,
That he will be persuaded to allow
The gods are false, without accusing you ?
Who knows what in their wrath, that seems them just,
The Greeks may do, defrauded of their victim ?
Beware of forcing an indignant people
To make their choice between the gods and you.
Was it not you yourself whose urgent voice
Summon'd us all to far Scamander's banks,
From town to town appealing to those oaths
Which Helen's suitors took in former days,
When all your brother's rivals throughout Greece
Sought her in marriage from Tyndareus
Her sire ? Whatever bridegroom she might choose,
His right we then swore stoutly to defend ;
And should his prize be stolen, we engaged
To bring him the presumptuous robber's head.

But without you that oath, which love imposed,
Would with that love have pass'd and been forgotten :
You made us loose the later ties that bound
Our hearts to home, leaving our wives and children.
And when, assembled here from land and sea,
The eyes of all flash vengeance for your sake ;
When Greece, already voting you her leader,
Owns you the author of this grand emprise;
When all her kings, who might dispute that rank
With you, are ready in your cause to risk
Their very lives ; lo, only Agamemnon
Refuses to buy victory and fame
With a few drops of blood, and, sore dismay'd
E'en at the outset, orders a retreat !
•

AGAMEMNON.

Ah, it is easy for a heart that knows
No woe like mine to be magnanimous !
But if you saw your son Telemachus
Approach the altar, deck'd for sacrifice,
That dreadful spectacle would make you blench,
And we should see you soon exchange your scorn
For tears, pierc'd with such grief as now I feel,
And cast yourself 'tween Calchas and your boy !
You know that I have giv'n my solemn word,
And, if my daughter comes, she shall be slain ;
But if a happier fate, in spite of me,
Keeps her at home, or stops her on the way,
Then let these savage rites be urg'd no more,
Let me interpret in my daughter's favour
This obstacle, and welcome it as sent
By some kind god who watches o'er her life.
Your cruel counsels have prevail'd too far,
And now I blush—

Scene 4.

AGAMEMNON, ULYSSES, EURYBATES.

EURYBATES.

My lord—

AGAMEMNON.

Ah, with what message

Come you ?

EURYBATES.

The Queen, whose steps my haste outstripp'd,
Will soon consign your daughter to your arms ;
She now draws near, but for some time she lost
The way, within these woods around the camp ;
Amid their gloomy shades we hardly found
Again the right direction we had quitted.

AGAMEMNON.

Good Heav'ns !

EURYBATES.

She also brings young Eriphyle
Who fell into Achilles' hands in Lesbos,
And comes to Aulis, as she says, to ask
Of Calchas what her unknown destiny
May be. Already are the tidings spread
Of their approach, and an enchanted crowd
Admiring view Iphigenia's charms,
And cry aloud to Heav'n with ceaseless pray'rs
To bless her. Some greet with respectful homage
The Queen, while others fain would learn the cause
Which brings her. But they all alike confess
That if the gods never enthroned a king
More glorious, or with equal favours crown'd,
Never was father happier than yourself.

AGAMEMNON.

Enough, Eurybates ; now you may leave us.
I must consider what is to be done.

Scene 5.

AGAMEMNON, ULYSSES.

AGAMEMNON.

Just Heav'n, 'tis thus, making thy vengeance sure,
That thou dost break the web vain prudence spins!
Would that I were at least free to let fall
Tears that relieve the anguish of the heart!
Sad destiny of kings! Slaves that we are
To fate's severity and men's opinions,
We see ourselves beset with witnesses,
And the most wretched do not dare to weep.

ULYSSES.

I am no stranger to a father's weakness,
My own heart tells me all that thou must feel,
And, sympathizing with each troubled sigh,
I'm more disposed to share than blame thy tears.
But now no plea is left for love to urge
With justice. Lo, the gods have brought their victim
To Calchas, and he knows it. If she tarry,
He will not fail himself to come and claim her.
Are we not yet alone? Indulge thy grief,
Check not the tears that tenderness extorts.
Mourn for the maiden's blood, mourn; but, to soothe
Thine anguish, think what honour thence will spring:
See Hellespont all white beneath our oars,
And faithless Troy in flames, her people led
In fetters, Priam prostrate at thy knees,
And Helen to her spouse by thee restored;
See the gay garlands on each lofty stern
Of our triumphant fleet, with thee return'd
To Aulis here, in glory that shall be
The theme of countless ages yet unborn.

AGAMEMNON.

I know too well 'tis useless to resist.
Go; and the victim soon shall follow thee.

But silence Calchas until all is ready ;
Help me the dreadful mystery to hide,
While far from sight so sad a mother's steps I guide.

ACT II.

Scene 1.

ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

ERIPHYLE.

Let us relieve them of our presence, Doris,
While in the arms of father and of husband
They vie in demonstration of their love,
Thus setting free my sorrow and their joy.

DORIS.

Why, Madam, acting as your own tormentor,
Give you yourself up to tears and misery ?
All is displeasing to a captive's eyes,
Joy vanishes with liberty, I know ;
But when in sorer straits we cross'd the waves,
Against our will, with him who conquer'd Lesbos ;
When in his vessel borne, a timid thrall,
You saw the victor who in human blood
Had waded, from your eyes fell fewer tears,
And sorrow was not then your sole employment.
Now all smiles brightly ; sweet Iphigenia
Is bound to you by ties of true affection ;
She pities you with all a sister's love,
And e'en at Troy you would not meet such kindness.
You wish'd to see the place to which her father
Call'd her, and here at Aulis you arrive
With her. Yet, strange fatality, your grief
Seems to increase with every step we take.

ERIPHYLE.

Nay, strange 'twould be if hapless Eriphyle
Could be a calm spectator of their joy.

Think you that my dejection ought to vanish
At sight of happiness I may not share ?
I see a daughter in a father's arms,
The pride and glory of a mother's heart ;
While I, exposed to perils ever new,
Indebted from my cradle to the care
Of strangers, live since first I saw the light
Without the comfort of a parent's smile.
I know not who I am, and, worst of all,
A dreadful oracle to ignorance
Attaches safety, saying that the day
That brings to light the source from which I spring
Must see me perish.

DORIS.

Nay, pursue your search
Undaunted. Heav'n delights in mystery,
And hides its meaning under strange disguise :
Losing a false name you will thus regain
Your own. No other danger need you dread ;
'Tis thus that Eriphyle is to perish.
You know your name was changed in infancy.

ERIPHYLE.

Naught else about myself to me is known ;
Your poor ill-fated sire, who knew the rest,
Never vouchsafed me any further light.
He said my proper rank should be restored
To me in Troy, whither, alas, I thought
To go invited, and resume the name
Derived from royal ancestors. Already
I seem'd to look upon that famous city.
But Heaven brought to Lesbos fell Achilles,
And all gave way before his dire attack.
Your father, buried 'neath a heap of slain,
Left me a captive, to myself unknown ;
And there remain'd of all my promised greatness
To me, the slave of Greeks, naught but the pride
Of noble blood, which I am powerless
To prove.

DORIS.

In slaying such a faithful witness,
How cruel, Madam, must that hand appear
Which did the deed ! But Calchas, famous Calchas
Is here, who reads the secrets of the gods.
They deign themselves to teach him, and he sees
The future and the past alike unveil'd :
He cannot fail to know your parentage.
This camp itself is full of kind protectors :
Wedding Achilles, soon Iphigenia
Will offer you a home beneath his care,
As promised in my presence and confirm'd
With oaths. She looks for this as the first pledge
Of faith from him.

ERIPHYLE.

What would you say, dear Doris,
If of my woes this marriage was the worst ?

DORIS.

What, Madam !

ERIPHYLE.

It surprises you to see
That my distress refuses consolation.
Listen, and you will marvel that I live.
To be a stranger, captive, and unknown
E'en to myself. is but a light affliction ;
Achilles, author of the woes of Lesbos,
Of thine and mine, who took me prisoner,
Who snatch'd your father from me, and with him
The knowledge of my birth, whose very name
Should make me shudder, is of mortals dearest
To me.

DORIS.

Ah ! What is this you say !

ERIPHYLE.

I thought
To let eternal silence hide my weakness :
But when the heart is full it overflows,

And once for all I make a true confession.
Ask me not, on what slender hope relying,
I learn'd to entertain this fatal love.
I cannot charge therewith any false pity
That my misfortunes seem'd to wake in him :
The gods without a doubt take cruel joy
In shooting all the shafts of their ill-will
At me. Shall I recall the dread remembrance
Of that sad day which cast us both in chains ?
Long in those hands that tore me from my home
I lay in darkness, lifeless and despairing.
At last my wan eyes sought the light of day ;
Seeing myself seized by an arm inured
To blood, I trembled, Doris, and I fear'd
To meet a savage conqueror's frightful frown.
I went on board his vessel, holding him
A hateful monster that my eyes were loath
To look on. I beheld him ; in his face
I saw no fierceness ; on my lips reproach
Remain'd unutter'd, while against myself
My heart declared, and, all my wrath forgotten,
I could but weep, to such a gentle guide
Submissive. Loved at Lesbos, no less dear
Is he at Aulis. Offers of protection,
Of sympathy and succour, all are vain,
So works the madness that torments my heart
Iphigenia's proffer'd hand I take
Only, unseen, to arm myself against her,
And thwart the happiness I cannot bear.

DORIS.

How can a feeble spite avail to harm her ?
Were it not better never to have left
Mycenæ, than t' encounter torture here,
Struggling against a hopeless, hidden flame ?

ERIPHYLE.

I wish'd to stay, my Doris, but the more
I shunn'd the picture of her triumph here,
So sad to me, fate drew me to these shores :

I heard a secret voice that bade me come
And whisper'd that my presence might relieve
My aching heart, and, on their joy intruding,
With near approach, some shadow of my woe
Might fall, perchance, on them with fatal blight.
That is what brings me hither, not impatience
To learn to whom I owe a birth so wretched :
Or rather that their marriage may to me
Serve as the sentence that shall end my life.
Yes, Doris, I will die ; a sudden stroke,
Shall bury in the darkness of the tomb
My shame, heedless of parents still unknown,
Whom my infatuation has dishonour'd.

DORIS.

Ah, how I pity you ! What tyranny—

ERIPHYLE.

Lo, Agamemnon and Iphigenia !

Scene 2.

AGAMEMNON, IPHIGENIA, ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

IPHIGENIA.

Whither so fast away ? What urgent need
Calls thee, my lord, so soon from our embrace ?
To what shall I impute this hasty flight ?
With due respect I yielded to the Queen
The earliest greeting. May I not, in turn,
Detain thee for a moment, and display
The joy that—

AGAMEMNON.

Yes, my daughter, let thine arms
Clasp me ; thy father has not ceased to love thee.

IPHIGENIA.

Dear is that love to me. How I rejoice

To see thee, in new majesty resplendent !
What pow'r and glory ! Fame had told already
A tale of wonder which had reach'd our ears ;
But seeing close at hand a sight so welcome,
How my surprise and pleasure are increased !
Ye gods ! How Greece must love and honour him !
What bliss to be the child of such a sire !

AGAMEMNON.

Daughter, thou did'st deserve a happier father.

IPHIGENIA.

What happiness is wanting to thy wishes ?
What king to greater honours can aspire ?
Are not my thanks—thanks only—due to Heav'n ?

AGAMEMNON (*aside*).

Great gods ! Shall I prepare her for her fate ?

IPHIGENIA.

Why dost thou hide thy face, my lord, and sigh ?
It seems to pain thee but to look on me.
Have we by thee unbidden left Mycenæ ?

AGAMEMNON.

I see thee, child, with the same eyes of love
As ever ; but, with change of time and place,
Gladness is overmatch'd with anxious thoughts.

IPHIGENIA.

Father, forget the cares of office now.
I know we must be parted, and for long.
Thou need'st not blush to give a father's love
A moment's sway. Thou seest that none is near
But a young princess who has heard me boast
Thy tenderness to me. A hundred times
I promised thou would'st love her for my sake,
And made no secret of my happiness :
What will she think of this indifference ?

Have I buoy'd up her wishes with false hopes?
Wilt thou not clear this trouble from thy brow?

AGAMEMNON.

My daughter!

IPHIGENIA.

Speak, I hear.

AGAMEMNON.

Ah, no; I cannot.

IPHIGENIA.

Perish the Trojan prince, who caused these ills!

AGAMEMNON.

Ere that may be, 'twill cost us many a tear.

IPHIGENIA.

The gods with special care watch o'er thy life!

AGAMEMNON.

Long have I found them cruel and unheeding.

IPHIGENIA.

Calchas, I hear, a solemn sacrifice
Prepares.

AGAMEMNON.

Ah, might I first their hearts incline
To mercy!

IPHIGENIA.

Will it soon be offer'd?

AGAMEMNON.

Sooner

Than I could wish.

IPHIGENIA.

Shall I be free to join

My pray'rs with thine, shall thy glad family
Surround the altar ?

AGAMEMNON.

Ah !—

IPHIGENIA.

Why art thou silent ?

AGAMEMNON.

Thou shalt be there, my daughter !

Fare thee well.

Scene 3.

IPHIGENIA, ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

IPHIGENIA.

What am I to expect from this sad greeting ?
A secret horror makes my blood run cold :
Against my will I dread some ill unknown.
Just gods ! Ye know whose safety I implore !

ERIPHYLE.

'Mid anxious cares that needs must overwhelm him,
Does but a little coldness make you tremble ?
Alas ! What reason then have I to sigh,
Who never knew a parent's tender care,
Cast among strangers from my very birth,
Not even then perchance welcomed with looks
Of love ! If your affection by a father
Is scorn'd, at least you have a mother's breast
Whereon to weep. Your woe is not so keen,
But that a lover's hand can dry your tears !

IPHIGENIA.

I'll not gainsay it. Grief itself must yield
Ere long, before the efforts of Achilles.

His love, his valour—ay, a daughter's duty
Give him just claim over my heart and soul.
But of himself I know not what to think :
This lover, so impatient to behold me,
Whom nothing could induce to leave these shores
Till from my distant home a father call'd me
To be his bride,—where is the eagerness
With which I deem'd him waiting to receive me ?
For two days past, as ev'ry hour we came
Nearer this place, which I so wish'd to see,
I thought each timid glance would light on him
With which I scann'd the ways that led from Aulis,
Sending my heart far in advance to meet him,
And ask'd of all I saw, where was Achilles.
At last, without his escort, we arrive,
Jostled and stared at by a crowd of strangers ;
Still he appears not. Agamemnon seems
Afraid to let his lips pronounce his name.
Where is he ? Who can solve this mystery ?
And shall I find the lover no less cold
Than the sad father ? Have the cares of war
Extinguish'd in all hearts the warmth of love ?
But no, unjust alarm wrongs his devotion.
'Twas I who urged him to assist the cause
Of Greece. He was not present when at Sparta
All Helen's suitors to her father took
Their solemn oath. Alone of all the Greeks
Unbound by any pledge, if against Troy
He sails, 'tis for my sake. Myself the prize
Sufficient, wedding me, thither he flies.

Scene 4.

CLYTÆMNESTRA, IPHIGENIA, ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

My daughter, we must hence without delay,
And save by flight your honour and my own.
I am no more astonish'd that your father

Seem'd overwhelm'd with sorrow and confusion
At seeing us again : wishing to spare
The insult of rejection, he by Arcas
Had sent this letter, only just received,
For, as we went astray, he fail'd to find us.
Come then, and let us save our wounded honour :
Achilles, it would seem, has changed his mind
About your marriage, and declines the favour
We would bestow, postponing the espousals
Till his return.

IPHIGENIA.

What do I hear ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

This insult
Flushes your cheek. Let pride your courage arm.
Though, of his suit approving, it was I
Myself who promised you to him in Argos,
Moved by the fame of his nobility
To wed you to the offspring of a goddess ;
Yet, since his base repentance now belies
Birth so divine as rumour has reported,
It rests with us to show him who we are,
And see in him the lowest of mankind.
Shall we by staying longer make him think
We wish and wait for the return of love
To his cold heart. The nuptials he defers
Let us dissolve. Your father has been told
Of my intent, and comes to take farewell.
I must make ready for our prompt departure.

(To ERIPHYLE.)

I do not urge you, Madam, to return
With us ; in dearer hands I leave you here.
Your secret schemes have come to light, nor was it
Calthas who drew your willing steps to Aulis.

Scene 5.

IPHIGENIA, ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

IPHIGENIA.

In what despair and woe these words have left me !
Achilles then is fickle in his love !
I must go back to Argos in disgrace !
And 'tis not Calchas you are seeking here !

ERIPHYLE.

Madam, I fail to understand such speech.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, you can comprehend me if you will.
Fate's cruel sentence robs me of a husband ;
Will you abandon me to my misfortune ?
You could not stay without me at Mycenæ ;
Are we to start from Aulis without you ?

ERIPHYLE.

I wish to see the prophet ere I start.

IPHIGENIA.

Why do you then delay to let him know it ?

ERIPHYLE.

A moment more will see you on your way.

IPHIGENIA.

A moment sometimes clears up many doubts.
But I am pressing you too closely, Madam ;
I see what I was loath to think : Achilles—
In your impatience to get rid of me—

ERIPHYLE.

I ? You suspect me of this treachery ?
How can I love the cruel hand that crush'd me,

Dyed crimson in the blood of all my kin,
That lit the blazing torch, and laid in ashes
Lesbos—

IPHIGENIA.

Ah yes, you love him, base deceiver !
The savage conduct that you paint so well,
Those arms that you have seen stain'd red with gore,
Fury and flames, and Lesbos burnt to ashes,
All these have stamp'd his image on your heart,
And, far from shuddering at their remembrance,
It even gives you pleasure to repeat them.
When your complaints were loudest, more than once
I might have seen your thoughts, and so I did,
But always with good-natured readiness
Replaced the bandage from mine eyes removed.
You love him. Ah ! What fatal misconception
Made me receive my rival in mine arms ?
My heart I gave her blindly, and to-day
Pledged the protection of its perjured lover.
Little I thought so soon to see her triumph,
And be myself chain'd to her chariot wheels.
The selfishness of passion I can pardon
That robs me of the heart I deem'd mine own ;
But not the treachery that laid a snare
To catch me, and then suffer'd me, unwarn'd,
To step therein, finding thus, far from home,
No ardent welcome, but a cold repulse.

ERIPHYLE.

This charge is one that fills me with surprise ;
I have not been accusom'd to such words ;
And though the gods have long press'd hard against me,
As yet they spared my ears a wound so grievous.
But some excuse is due to love's injustice.
What warning would you wish me to have giv'n ?
Can you suppose Achilles could prefer
To Agamemnon's daughter one who knows
Naught of her birth save that within her veins
Flows blood such as Achilles burns to shed ?

IPHIGENIA.

You triumph, cruel one, and flout my wrongs,
Making me feel my misery the more.
Why with the honours of my birth compare
Your exile, but the better to enhance
Your victory unjust? But curb your transports;
This Agamemnon whom you choose to mock
Holds sway o'er Greece, yet condescends to love
His daughter, and resents her injuries
More warmly than herself. My tears in prospect
Moved him to sighs he sought in vain to stifle.
Alas! His gloomy greeting I condemn'd
And dared to blame his want of tenderness!

Scene 6.

ACHILLES, IPHIGENIA, ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

ACHILLES.

Can it be so? Is it yourself I see?
I thought that all the camp had been deceived.
You here in Aulis! With what purpose come you?
I heard another tale from Agamemnon.

IPHIGENIA.

Be of good cheer, my lord; I will not thwart
Your wishes, and shall soon be gone again.

Scene 7.

ACHILLES, ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

ACHILLES.

She flies from me! Am I awake, or dreaming?
Into what fresh distraction am I plunged!
Madam, I know not if without offence
Achilles may present himself before you;

But if you will not scorn a foe's entreaty,
If e'er his captive touch'd a chord of pity
In him, you know what brings their footsteps hither,
You know—

ERIPHYLE.

And does my lord not know it too?
Did not your eager love a month ago
Desire their presence here without delay?

ACHILLES.

A month ago I was not here myself;
It was but yesterday that I return'd.

ERIPHYLE.

What! Was it not your love inspired the letter
That Agamemnon to Mycenæ wrote?
Were you not smitten with his daughter's charms—

ACHILLES.

Ay, and more captivated now than ever.
If wishes could have carried me to Argos,
I would myself this journey have forestall'd.
Yet she flies from me. What has been my crime?
I see around me none but hostile eyes:
This very moment Calchas and Ulysses,
With Nestor too, used all their eloquence
In opposition to my love, and seem'd
To urge that honour had superior claim.
What subtle scheme can they be hatching here!
Am I a laughing-stock to all the army?
I'll enter, and extort from them their secret.

Scene 8.

ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

ERIPHYLE.

Ye gods, who see my shame, where shall I hide me?
Proud rival, thou art loved; yet dost thou murmur!
Must I at once thy triumph and reproaches
Endure? Ah, rather—

But I'm much mistaken,
Or over them a storm, ready to burst,
'Threatens disturbance to their happiness:
Iphigenia is deceived, Achilles
Mock'd, Agamemnon groans. I'll not despair;
And, if my hatred finds support from fate,
I shall know how to turn it to my profit,
Nor weep alone, nor die without revenge.

ACT III.

Scene 1.

AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

'Tis true, my lord, we should have gone ere now
Far on our way to Argos, where your daughter
Might weep for her disgrace, leaving Achilles
And you in anger, had not he himself
Just now, astonish'd at our sudden flight,
Restrain'd us with such oaths as could not fail
To make us trust him, urgent for the marriage
We thought postponed, while love and wrath contended
For mastery, disowning the false rumour,
Eager to know its author and confound him:
Banish suspicions which have marr'd our joy.

AGAMEMNON.

Yes, Madam, with my sanction you may trust him.
I recognise the error that deceived me,
And share your joy to th' utmost of my pow'r.
Would you have Calchas to my family
•Unite him? Send your daughter to the altar;
I will be there. But, ere proceeding further,
I wish'd to speak a word with you in private.
You see how you have brought her to a place
Where all breathes war, not hymeneal songs.
The tumult of a camp, soldiers and sailors
With spears and javelins bristling round the altar,
•Offer a scene to swell Achilles' pride,
But to your tender sight harsh and uncouth.
Shall Greece there see the consort of their King
Bereft of dignity and royal state?
Hear me. Without you, let Iphigenia
Go to this marriage, by your maids attended.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What! Must I then, to other arms confiding
My child, not finish what I have begun,
And, after bringing her from Argos hither,
Refuse to guide her footsteps to the altar!
Is yours to be a nearer place than mine
By Calchas? Who will give her to Achilles,
Or order the procession as is meet?

AGAMEMNON.

This is not Atreus' palace, where you are,
But a rude camp—

CLYTEMNESTRA.

• Where all submits to you,
Where Asia's fate is to your hands intrusted,
Where marshall'd 'neath your sway I see the whole
Of Greece, where Thetis' son will call me mother.
•In what proud palace upon all the earth
Could I appear with more magnificence?

AGAMEMNON.

Deign, Madam, for the sake of the Immortals '
From whom we spring, to grant my love this favour.
I have my reasons.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

By those selfsame gods
Deprive me not, my lord, of sight so sweet.
Why should my presence here make you ashamed?

AGAMEMNON.

I had hoped more from your obliging temper
But, since the force of reason cannot move you
And my entreaty has so little pow'r,
My tone must change to one of stern command.
It is my will you do as I have said.
Obey.

Scene 2.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What means he, cruel and unjust,
Thus from the marriage altar to debar me?
Proud of new rank, forgets he who I am?
And am I deem'd unworthy to appear
Beside him? Or, timid 'mid all his pow'r,
Fears he that Helen's sister may bring scorn
On him? Why should I hide me? Is it fair
His shame should be reflected on my brow?
But, since it is his will, my own submits.
Thy happiness, my daughter, makes amends
For all. Heav'n gives Achilles to thine arms,
And I am overjoy'd—

But, lo, himself!

Scene 3.

ACHILLES, CLYTÆMNESTRA.

ACHILLES.

• Madam, all goes according to my wishes ;
Misunderstandings clear'd, the King is pleas'd
To trust my ardour, and, ere all is said,
With warm embrace accepts me for a son.
Few words express'd consent. But have you heard
What joy your presence to the camp has brought ?
• The gods will be appeased ; Calchas proclaims
Their reconciliation in an hour ;
That Neptune and the winds our pray'rs will grant,
Soon as his hand the victim's blood shall spill.
Already every ship with sails outspread
Is turn'd tow'rds Troy, relying on his promise.
As for myself, tho' love were gratified
If Heav'n were still to keep its breezes back,
Tho' I must grieve to quit this happy shore
Where soon for me the nuptial torch will glow ;
Yet can I fail to welcome an occasion
To seal our marriage-bond with Trojan blood,
And 'neath Troy's ruins bury the disgrace
Of one whose family will then be mine.

*Scene 4.*ACHILLES, CLYTÆMNESTRA, IPHIGENIA, ERIPHYLE,
DORIS, ÆGINA.

ACHILLES.

• On you, dear princess, all my hopes depend ;
Your father to our union yields consent,
And at the altar waits. There take a heart
Already yours.

IPHIGENIA,

'Tis not yet time to go.

With the queen's leave, my lord, I dare to ask
A pledge your love should grant right willingly.

On this young princess, for my sake, take pity :

Heav'n on her brow has stamp'd nobility.

Her eyes bedew'd with tears, she ever mourns

Her misery ; you know it, for from you

It came. And I myself, unjustly wroth,

Have made her more unhappy than before.

I fain would counteract by timely help

The wrong my words have done her, if I may.

My voice I lend her now, I can no more.

My lord, you only can undo your work :

She is your captive ; and at your command

Her chains will fall, and give my heart relief.

Thus then inaugurate this happy day,

Nor let the sight of us increase her woe.

Show that I am about to wed a king

Who, not content to strike men's hearts with fear,

Does not confine his fame to fire and sword,

But, melted by the tears of one he loves

And in his hour of victory disarm'd

By grief, can imitate the gods from whom

He springs.

ERIPHYLE.

Yes, Sir, assuage these poignant pangs.

Lesbos subdued, your captive I became ;

But 'tis to push the rights of war too far

To add the torment that I suffer here.

ACHILLES

You, Madam ?

ERIPHYLE.

Yes, my lord ; all else omitted,

What punishment more dire can you impose

Than this of giving my sad eyes the pain

Of seeing those who persecute me happy ?

I hear on all sides threats against my people ;

I see an army raging to attack them ;
And now, to add a sorer wound, I see
Flames to devour my country in the torch
Of Hymen. Far from Aulis and from you,
For ever wretched and unknown for ever,
Let me go hide a fate that claims compassion,
Whose bitterness these tears but half express.

ACHILLES.

Too much, fair princess ! Come that, in the sight
Of Greece, Achilles may pronounce you free.
This hour, to me more sweet than all before,
Shall gladden you with liberty once more.

Scene 5.

ACHILLES, CLYTÆMNESTRA, IPHIGENIA, ERIPHYLE, ARCAS,
ÆGINA, DORIS.

ARCAS.

Madam, all's ready for the solemn rite.
Beside the altar the King waits his daughter ;
I come to claim her : or, more truly, Sir,
I come for her thy succour to implore
Against him.

ACHILLES.

Arcas, what is this ?

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

Great gods !

ARCAS (*to* ACHILLES).

Thou, Sir, and thou alone, canst now defend her.

ACHILLES.

'Gainst whom ?

ARCAS.

His name I utter with regret ;

Too long already have I kept his secret ;
The knife, the fire, the fillet, all are ready,
And, were the stroke on mine own head to fall,
I needs must speak.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

Explain thyself. I tremble.

ACHILLES.

Speak, be it what may, and have no fear.

ARCAS.

Thou her affianced husband, thou her mother,
Beware, send not the princess to her father.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

Why, what have we to dread ?

ACHILLES.

Wherefore distrust him ?

ARCAS.

He at the altar waits to offer her
In sacrifice.

ACHILLES.

Her sire !

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

His child !

IPHIGENIA.

My father !

ERIPHYLE.

Ye gods, what tidings !

ACHILLES.

What blind rage can arm
His mind against her ? Who could hear of it
Without a shudder ?

ARCAS.

Would that I could doubt it !

By Calchas' voice the oracle demands her,
Refusing to accept another victim ;
The gods, who hitherto have favour'd Paris,
At this price only promise favouring winds
And Troy's destruction.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

Can the gods command

Foul murder !

IPHIGENIA.

For what guilt am I condemned
To such a fate ?

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

No more am I surprised
That I should be forbidden to approach
The altar.

IPHIGENIA (*to ACHILLES*).

This, then, is my destined marriage !

ARCAS.

The King devised these nuptials to deceive you :
Deceived was all the army like yourselves.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

See how I stoop to clasp thy knees !

ACHILLES (*raising her*).

Ah, Madam !

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

I loathe my royal dignity. Forget it.
This sad humiliation suits a lot
Desp'rate, unless my tears can stir thy pity.
A mother feels no shame thus at thy feet
To fall. Alas ! it is thy bride they snatch

Out of thine arms ; whose tender hopes I nursed
From childhood. 'Twas in search of thee we reach'd
This fatal shore ; thy name brings her to death.
Shall she go beg for justice from the gods,
And clasp their altars, for her sacrifice
Festoon'd ? She has none other here than thee ;
Thou art to her a father, husband, Heav'n,
Her only shelter. In thine eyes I read
Unutterable grief. With him, my child,
I leave thee. Quit her not, but wait for me ;
To faithless Agamemnon must I hasten,
And overwhelm him with indignant fury ;
Calchas will have to find another victim :
Or, if I cannot save my daughter's life,
My neck shall first be offer'd to the knife.

Scene 6.

ACHILLES, IPHIGENIA.

ACHILLES.

Madam, my tongue is silent, and my limbs
Seem palsied. Is it to mine ears such words
Are spoken ? Must a mother kneel and sue
To me for thee, a queen fall at my feet
Prostrate ! And, wronging me by fears unjust,
Has she recourse to tears to melt my heart !
Thy life to me is dearer than to all
Besides. My faithful heart claims full reliance ;
No harm to thee can fail to touch mine honour ;
I answer for a life that to mine own
Is join'd. But indignation moves me further :
'Tis little to protect thee ; to revenge
I run, and punishment for that vile scheme
Which dares to use my name for thy destruction.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, stay, my lord, and deign to hear me.

ACHILLES.

What!

Shall I endure so barbarous an insult?
He sees me eager to avenge the wrong
His sister suffer'd, knows that it was I
Who voted first for him to be elected
Commander over twenty kings, his rivals;
And for the fruit of all my toil and care,
My sole reward for victory that will bring
Vengeance and wealth to him with glory's crown,
The height of my ambition was to hear
Thee call me husband, to be thine was all
I ask'd of him; yet savage and forsworn,
To-day he thinks it little to do outrage
To natural affection, and to show me
Thy bleeding heart consumed upon an altar;
Veiling this sacrifice with marriage rites,
He would that it were I should lead thee thither,
My hand should be his tool to hold the knife,
Thy promised bridegroom be thy murderer!
Ah, how these bloody nuptials might have ended,
Had I come one day later than I did!
This very moment, in their ruthless pow'r
Placed, thou wouldst search for me beside the altar
In vain, then unforeseen the knife would fall,
And dying thou wouldst blame me for deceit
Most base!

• Then must I, in the sight of Greece,
Claim satisfaction for such treachery.
A husband's honour, Madam, is with thine
Involved, and thou must needs praise mine intent.
The cruel monster who has pour'd disdain
On me shall learn whose name he dared to stain.

IPHIGENIA. •

Oh! If thou lovest me and one last favour
Wilt grant, attentive to a lover's pray'r,
Now is the time for me to prove it, Sir.
Bethink thee that this monster thou defiest,
This barbarous, bloodthirsty, unjust foe
Is still, whate'er he may have done, my father.

ACHILLES.

Thy father ! Nay, after this horrid scheme,
I know him only as thy foul assassin.

IPHIGENIA.

He is my father, Sir, once more I say it,
Yea, and a father whom I love and honour ;
Himself he holds me dear, and, till to-day,
No tokens but of tenderness from him
Have I received. My heart, from childhood taught
A daughter's duty, cannot but be grieved
At words that wound him. Far from being chang'd
So suddenly as to approve thy rage,
Still less to fan this fury with my breath,
Believe me, it is only the excess
Of love for thee that suffer'd me to hear
Those hateful names with which thou hast assail'd him.
Why will you deem him so unnatural
As not to groan at the impending blow ?
What father gladly would bemoan himself
Of his own offspring ? Why should he destroy me
If he could save ? I saw him weep, believe me ;
Condemn him not, my lord, ere thou hast heard him.
Alas ! his heart already is with horror
Sorely oppress'd, let not thy hatred crush it !

ACHILLES.

What, Madam ! 'Mid such subjects for alarm,
Are these the terrors that distress thee most ?
A cruel sire (how can I call him else ?)
Intends to slay thee by the hand of Calchas ;
And, when my love his fury would withstand,
Thy sole concern is to secure his peace,
To shut my mouth, to pity, and excuse.
'Tis I that do affright thee, and thy fears
Are all for him ! So little has my care
Avail'd to reach thy soul and fix Achilles there !

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, it is cruel thus to doubt my love !

Have I so long waited to make it known?
Thou seest with what a calm indifference
I have received the tidings of my doom,
Nor did my cheek turn pale. Would thou hadst seen
How, just before, distracted with despair,
I heard, when we arrived, a false report
That thou hadst proved inconstant! In what anguish,
With what a torrent of upbraiding words
I blamed the spite alike of gods and men!
Ah! hadst thou seen me then, thou wouldst not need
To hear me say how much thy love is dearer
To me than life! Who knows if Heav'n, provoked
By my exceeding happiness, has will'd
Its end! Alas, a flame so fair and bright
Seem'd to uplift me to a higher sphere
Than earth.

ACHILLES.

My princess, live, if still to thee I'm dear.

Scene 7.

ACHILLES, CLYTEMNESTRA, IPHIGENIA, ÆGINA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My lord, unless you save us, all is lost;
For Agamemnon fears to see my face,
Refusing me all access to the altar:
The guards whom he has station'd there himself
Have on all sides forbidden me to pass.
He shuns me, for my passion makes him quail.

ACHILLES.

Then, Madam, 'tis for me to take your place.
I'll see him, and accost him face to face.

IPHIGENIA.

Ah, mother!—

Whither will you go, my lord?
What mean you by unreasonable pray'rs?

ACHILLES.

Still must it be that first against yourself
I have to fight?

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

My child, explain your purpose.

IPHIGENIA.

In Heaven's name, restrain a frantic lover :
Let us avert this perilous encounter.
Your fierce reproaches, Sir, would leave a sting
Too sharp ; exasperated love, I know,
Runs wild with rage. My father's jealousy
Brooks no control ; proud are the sons of Atreus,
Leave it to lips more timid to address him.
Surprised at my delay, doubt not that hither
He will himself soon come in search of me.
A mother's lamentations he will hear,
And I, perchance, shall feel myself inspired
With arguments that may prevent your tears.
Your indignation quell, and let me live
For you.

ACHILLES.

Since such your pleasure, I submit.
Let sound advice fall from your lips together,
Recall his reason, and persuade his heart
Not to destroy our peace and, more than ours,
His own. In idle talk the precious moments
I lose. From me not words but deeds are wanted.

(To CLYTÆMNESTRA.)

Madam, I will do all I can to serve you :
Go, seek your chamber, and take needful rest.
Your daughter shall not die, so I predict,
An oracle more sure than that of Calchas.
Believe me that as long as I draw breath
In vain the gods may have ordain'd her death,

ACT IV.

Scene 1.

ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

DORIS.

How say you? What strange madness makes you envy
Iphigenia's lot? Within an hour
She perishes. Yet never, so you tell me,
Were you more jealous of her happiness.
Who could believe it? Where is heart so wild—

ERIPHYLE.

My mouth has never utter'd word more true :
Never has her felicity so moved
My anxious soul with envious unrest.
Such danger were delight! But hope is vain!
Did you not see her triumph,—his concern?
I saw and shunn'd tokens I could not doubt.
This hero, terrible to all besides,
Who knows no tears but those he makes to flow,
Who steel'd himself from infancy against them,
And who, if rumour tells a tale of truth,
Suck'd the fierce blood of lions and of bears,
For her sake learns the language of alarm :
Yes, she has seen him weep, his cheek turn pale.
Yet Doris pities her! What dire misfortune
Would I not suffer, might those tears be shed
For me! Tho' I were doom'd to die like her
Within an hour—Die? Nay, believe it not.
Think you Achilles is an idle dreamer,
That, fearing for her safety, he will spare
His boldest efforts to achieve her rescue?
No, you shall find this oracle was spoken
But to enhance his glory and my torment,
To leave her fairer in his eyes than ever.
See you not all that in her favour works?

The fatal sentence has been kept a secret ;
And, though the funeral pyre be now prepared,
The victim's name is still unknown : the camp
Remains in ignorance. This silence, Doris,
Cannot but indicate a wavering purpose.
What will he do ? Has he a heart of iron,
To bear th' attack of their combined entreaties,
A mother's anger, and a daughter's tears,
Cries of despair from all his family,
His own affection ready to relent,
Nor least Achilles' threats that never fell
But to o'erwhelm ? No, 'tis in vain that Heav'n
Condemns her. Misery is mine alone
For ever. If I follow'd mine own impulse—

DORIS.

What's in your mind ?

ERIPHYLE.

I know not what restrains
My anger from revealing all the truth,
Divulging straightway what the gods have threaten'd,
And publishing abroad the guilty plots
Laid to dishonour them and cheat their altars.

DORIS.

Ah ! What a thought !

ERIPHYLE.

What joy if it were done !
How would the Trojan temples smoke with incense,
If, in revenge for my captivity,
I could arm Agamemnon 'gainst Achilles,
And, Troy forgotten, make them turn the sword,
Whetted for her destruction, on each other,
And Greece, embroil'd in civil strife by me,
Be sacrificed to save my countrymen !

DORIS.

I hear a sound. I think the queen approaches.
Madam, compose your spirits, or retire.

FRIPHYLE.

Let us go in and think how best my rage
That Heaven sanctions may confound this marriage.

Scene 2.

CLYTÆMNESTRA. ÆGINA.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

It breaks my heart to see her, dear Ægina.
She sheds her tears, nor trembles for her life,
But all her care is to excuse her father,
And to persuade me to respect the hand
That slays her. Oh, what filial constancy!
He, in return for love so tender, chides
Delay, and soon will ask of me the reason,
Still hoping to conceal his treachery.
He comes. Let me not taunt him with injustice,
But see if he persists in his deceit.

Scene 3.

AGAMEMNON, CLYTÆMNESTRA, ÆGINA.

AGAMEMNON.

What do you here ? Where is your daughter, Madam ?
How is she not with you, as I expected ?
Why waits she ? Did not Arcas bring my orders
To send her ? Is it you who keep her back ?
Do you resist my reasonable wishes,
And, save by you conducted, can she not •
Approach the altar ? Speak.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

My child is ready. But have you, my lord,
 No reason for delay? If she must go,

AGAMEMNON.

I, Madam?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Have you
Forgotten naught?

AGAMEMNON.

The altar is prepared,
And Calchas by its side, all as it should be.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My lord, you do not tell me of the victim.

AGAMEMNON.

What mean you, Madam? Why should your concern—

Scene 4.

AGAMEMNON, CLYTEMNESTRA, IPHIGENIA, ÆGINA.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Come, daughter, come: they only wait for thee:
Come, thank a father who so loves his child
That he himself will lead her to the altar.

AGAMEMNON.

What do I see and hear? Why weeps my daughter,
With downcast eyes, as if ashamed to meet
Mine own? What troubles thee? Thy mother too
Is weeping. Arcas has betray'd me!

IPHIGENIA.

Father,
Cease to be anxious, thou art not betray'd:
What thou commandest shall by me be done.
Thy will it is to take the life thou gavest;

I know it, and all subterfuge is vain.
With heart no less submissive and content
Than when the bridegroom of thy choice I hail'd,
Will I, if need be, an obedient victim,
Offer a guiltless head to Calchas' knife,
And, since it is thy will, with due respect
Yield the existence that I owe to thee.
But if this dutiful obedience seem
To merit in thine eyes some recompense,
If thou hast pity for a mother's tears,
Let me be bold to say that, young and happy,
I well might find life sweet enough to make
Me wish that it should not be snatch'd away,
That cruel Fate had not so soon cut short
The thread of which so little has been spun.
I, Agamemnon's daughter, it was I
Who call'd thee first by the dear name of father,
And I, in whom so long your eyes delighted,
Have made thee thank the gods that name was thine.
How often hast thou lavish'd fond caresses
On me, nor scorn'd as weakness love so tender.
Ah! With what pleasure did I make thee tell
Of countries that await thy conquering arm;
And, auguring thy triumph over Troy,
I was already in my mind preparing
Glad welcome home. I little thought my blood
Would be the first that thou would'st have to shed.
It is not dread of this impending blow
That makes me call past kindness to thy mind.
Fear naught; my heart is jealous of thine honour,
Nor will I make my father blush to own me;
And, had I only to defend my life,
I never would have raised fond recollections.
But well thou knowest how on my sad lot
A lover's and a mother's happiness
Depend. A prince, worthy to be thy son,
Trusted this day would light for him the torch
Of Hymen, and, relying on my heart
And on thy promise, deem'd it one of joy.
He knows thy purpose, judge of his alarm.
Look on my mother, and behold her tears.

Forgive these efforts to prevent the grief
That I shall cost them, if I die.

AGAMEMNON.

My daughter,
Too true it is. I know not for what crime
The anger of the gods demands a victim;
But they have named thee, and an oracle
Dooms thee to death upon an altar here.
To guard thy life from this their murderous sentence,
My love forestall'd thy pray'rs. I will not say
How often I resisted; never doubt
That love to which thou hast thyself borne witness.
This very night, as thou perchance hast heard,
I had revoked the order I was forced
To write; and o'er the general good of Greece
Thou didst prevail. For thee I sacrific'd
My rank, my safety. Arcas from the camp
Went to forbid thine entrance. Heav'n forbade
Your meeting, and frustrated my last hope
Of saving one condemn'd by its decree.
Rely not then upon my feeble pow'r:
What can avail to check a rebel army,
When Heav'n has giv'n us up to their blind zeal,
And frees them from a yoke that they resent?
We must submit, my child; thine hour is come.
Bethink thee of thy royal rank and nurture:
Alas, I need the counsel that I give;
The death stroke that awaits thee will no less
Strike me. Then, show thee worthy of thy birth,
And put to shame the gods who have condemn'd thee.
Go, let the Greeks, who to thy sacrifice
Consent, see in thy blood that shall be shed
Mine own.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Fit offspring of a fatal stock!
Thine is the blood of Atreus and Thyestes:
Thy daughter's murderer; there but remains
One horror more, to serve her as a feast
Before her mother. Savage, this is then

The gladsome sacrifice thou wast preparing
With artful care! Did not thy hand refuse
The infamy of writing a command
So cruel! Why dost thou pretend to feel
A false distress? Think not that tears can prove
A love that shrinks from bold defence in arms.
Why has not blood been shed for her in torrents?
What wreck and ruin tell of thy resistance?
What field with corpses cover'd seals my mouth?
Proofs such as these I would have had thee bring me
Of thine affection and desire to save her.
A fatal oracle ordains her death!
But what an oracle may seem to say
Not always is its meaning. Can just Heav'n
Thirst for the blood of innocence, or be
Honour'd by murder? If for Helen's crime
Her kin are punish'd, for her daughter send
To Sparta. So let Menelaus ransom
The wife whose frailty in his eyes seems small
Match'd with her charms. But surely it is madness
To make thyself the victim for her sin.
And why should I, smiting upon my breast,
With my own flesh and blood pay for her folly?
Does Helen then, for whom such jealous fires
Were kindled, curse of Europe and of Asia,
Seem worthy of thine efforts to regain her?
How often have we blush'd to speak her name!
Ere, to his woe, thy brother link'd his fate
With hers, she had been carried off by Theseus,
Who, as thou knowest and hast heard from Calchas
A thousand times, clandestinely unloosed
Her virgin zone; and, pledge of that amour,
A princess of her blood has been by her
Kept in concealment. But a brother's honour
Is the least cause of thy solicitude:
That lust of empire nothing can extinguish,
The pride of seeing twenty monarchs serve
And fear thee, empire to thine hands confided,
These are the gods who claim this sacrifice
From thee, who far from offering resistance
Dost make a barbarous merit of submission.

Jealous of pow'r that can excite their envy,
Thou dost not grudge to pay a heavy price
From thine own veins, that so thou mayest quell
All opposition to thy sovereign sway.
Is this to be a father? Outraged nature
Revolts at this perfidious cruelty.
A priest, surrounded by a brutal crowd,
Will on my child lay hands of violence,
Rend her bared bosom, and with curious eye
For omens search her palpitating heart!
While I, who brought her hither proud and happy,
Must needs go back alone and in despair!
Still will the ways be scented with the flow'rs
That 'neath her feet were scatter'd as we came!
It shall not be that to her doom I brought her,
Or thou wilt have to add my death to hers.
Ay, thou shalt never tear her from these arms,
While life is mine: no fears can shake my purpose.
Ruthless alike as husband and as father
Come, if thou darest, snatch her from the breast
That nursed her!

Go within again, my child!
And for the last time heed thy mother's voice.

Scene 5.

AGAMEMNON.

Such frenzied outburst might have been expected:
These are the cries of anger that I fear'd.
And I were happy, if my harass'd soul
Had nothing worse to dread than idle clamour!
Alas! Great gods, who have imposed this task,
Why were the feelings of a father left me?

Scene 6.

AGAMEMNON, ACHILLES.

ACHILLES.

My lord, a strange report has reach'd mine ears,
Which I am slow to credit. It is said,
And 'tis with horror I repeat the tale,
This day Iphigenia is to die
By thy command; that, stifling every instinct
Of pity, thou wilt give her up to Calchas,
• And that the maiden whom I thought to wed
Shall be by me conducted to the altar
A victim not a bride, so vile a part
Assign'd to me, deceived as well as she
By a mock marriage. What am I to think?
Wilt thou not silence such offensive rumours?

AGAMEMNON.

I am not bound, my lord, to give account
Of my designs. My daughter knows not yet
My sovereign will; when she shall be inform'd,
Thou too shalt learn what all the host shall hear.

ACHILLES.

Too well I know what fate thou dost reserve
For her.

AGAMEMNON.

If known to thee, why ask it then?

ACHILLES.

Why ask? O Heavens, am I to believe
Thou dardest to confess so foul a crime?
Dost think I will abet thy villainy,
And let thee slay thy child before my face,
• Forgetful of my faith, my love, mine honour?

AGAMEMNON.

But thou, who thus assailest me with threats,
Dost thou forget to whom thou speakest here?

ACHILLES.

Thou hast forgotten that it is thy daughter
Whom thou dost wrong, and whom I love.

AGAMEMNON.

Who gave thee

Charge of my family? Art thou her husband
To question my disposal of my daughter?
Am I no more her father? May she not—

ACHILLES.

She is no longer thine. Vain promises
Shall not deceive me. While a drop of blood
Flows in my veins, her life is link'd to mine;
I will protect my rights, based on thine oaths.
Was 't not for me that thou didst summon her?

AGAMEMNON.

Blame then the gods, who ask her at my hands:
Accuse the prophet Calchas, the whole army,
Ulysses, Menelaus,—most thyself.

ACHILLES.

Myself!

AGAMEMNON.

Ay: dost thou not complain to Heaven
Daily, for checking thee in thy desire
To conquer Asia? Wast thou not offended
At my just fears, making thy fury fill
The camp? I show'd thee how she might be saved;
But thou canst think of nothing else than Troy.
I would have closed the course thou fain would'st run;
Go, have thy wish: her death will open it
Before thee.

ACHILLES.

• How, ye gods, can I endure
This language that adds taunts to perjury ?
I, at the cost of her dear life, to wish
To leave this shore ! What has Troy done to me ?
What is my interest in her destruction ?
Deaf to the warnings of a goddess mother,
Nor heeding a distracted father's voice,
Why should I seek the death so oft predicted
As there my doom ? No ships e'er left Scamander
To plunder and lay waste Thessalian fields :
No soft seducer to Larissa came
To carry off my sister or my wife.
What private grudge have I ? What loss sustain'd ?
'Tis but for thee, barbarian, that I go,
Tho' I alone of all the Greeks to thee
Owe nothing, and by *my* voice thou was made
Their chief and mine. Did not mine arm avenge thee
In Lesbos, ere thou hadst this host assembled ?
And with what purpose are we gather'd here
But to restore his wife to Menelaus ?
How long have I been thought so chicken-hearted
As to let any snatch away from me
The bride I love ? Is then thy brother's right
To punish such an outrage his alone ?
Thy daughter pleased me ; I essay'd to win
Her favour, and my vows of love were paid
Only to her ; the prospect of our bliss
Made me pledge all to her, nothing to him,
Ships, soldiers, arms. Let him, if so he will,
Recover Helen, seek the victory
My blood must purchase. Priam, Paris, Helen,
I know them not ; I wish'd thy daughter's hand,
And sail not else.

AGAMEMNON.

• Fly then : to Thessaly
Return. Lo, I release thee from thine oath.
Of others more submissive I shall find
No lack, to wear the laurels promised thee,
To force the Fates to grant their arms success,

And see the day of Ilium's overthrow.
Thy scornful speech tells me how dear a price
For thy proud succour I should have to pay.
Self-constituted arbiter of Greece,
Thou fain wouldst leave me but an empty name.
Vaunting thy valour thou wouldst claim the lead,
And make all Greece cringe to thy sovereign will.
A benefit that serves as ground for censure
Is an offence. Less care I for thy valour
Than for obedience. Fly. Thy feeble anger
I fear not, and I snap all ties between us.

ACHILLES.

Be thankful for the single tie that holds
My wrath in check. Iphigenia's father
I still respect. Haply, without that name,
Great as thy pow'r may be, such bold defiance
Were thy last utterance. Hear but one word.
I have thy daughter and my fame alike
To guard. If her thou art resolved to slay,
Thy sword must through this body carve its way.

Scene 7.

AGAMEMNON.

Thus is it made impossible to save her!
My child, unaided, had more pow'r to move me.
His saucy love, that thinks to make me tremble,
Will speed the stroke that he would fain prevent.
No more demur! Defy his violence!
My honour is at stake, and turns the scale.
Achilles' threats settle my wavering heart:
Pity would seem the consequence of fear.
Ho! Guards, advance!

Scene 8.

AGAMEMNON, EURYBATES, GUARDS.

EURYBATES.

My lord.

AGAMEMNON (*aside*).

What shall I do?

How can I give them orders so inhuman?
• For what fierce conflict must I make me ready?
Who is this foe whom they are to arrest?
A mother waits, intrepid to defend
Her offspring from a father bent on slaughter:
My troops, than I less cruel, will respect
The daughter of their King clasp'd in her arms.
Achilles utters scornful threats: does that
Lessen my daughter's dutiful submission?
Has she been eager to escape the altar,
Or cried in terror at the stroke I wish
To deal her? Why such wish? This impious zeal,
What can it gain by sacrificing her?
However glorious be the prize proposed,
What bays can please me, water'd with her blood?
I wish to move th' almighty pow'rs of Heav'n:
What gods can be more cruel than myself?
I cannot do it. No, a father's love
Shall conquer, and compassion raise no longer
A blush of shame. Yes, she shall live.

But, what!

Shall proud Achilles trample on mine honour?
His arrogant presumption, so puff'd up,
Will think he made me tremble, made me yield—
Vain cares perplex my mind. Can I not bring
The haughty spirit of Achilles low?
Let my child be a sight to vex his eyes:
• He loves her, he shall see her wed another.

(*To EURYBATES.*)

Go, call the princess and the queen, and say
That they have naught to fear.

Scene 9.

AGAMEMNON, GUARDS.

AGAMEMNON.

Great gods, if still
Determined to bereave me of my child,
Before your hatred what can mortals do?
My love I know, that fain would rescue her,
But weighs her down; but such a costly victim
Is worth a second summons to obey
The harsh injunction that on me ye lay.

Scene 10.

AGAMEMNON, CLYTÆMNESTRA, IPHIGENIA, ERIPHYLE,
EURYBATES, DORIS, GUARDS.

AGAMEMNON.

Go, Madam, go, be careful of her life:
I give you back your child, a sacred trust:
Hasten her steps far from this dangerous place.
Arcas shall be your escort, with my guards;
His happy indiscretion I will pardon.
All hangs on secrecy and quick despatch:
As yet no word have Calchas or Ulysses
Spoken; beware they hear not of this flight.
Let no one see your daughter; all the camp
Must think I keep her still, and send you home
Alone. Now speed you hence. May Heav'n content
With tears already shed, withhold her long
From my sad eyes!

(*To his Guards.*)
Follow the queen.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

My lord !

IPHIGENIA.

Father !

AGAMEMNON.

- Let Calchas, thirsting for her blood,
Be foil'd: delay not. And, to mask your flight,
I will beguile him with some feign'd excuse:
I'll cause the fatal rites to be suspended.
- Claiming a respite till this day be ended.

Scene 11.

ERIPHYLE, DORIS.

ERIPHYLE.

Follow me, Doris: our way lies not there.

DORIS.

Go you not with them ?

ERIPHYLE.

Ah! At last I yield.
Achilles loves her,—thought that burns like fire
I will not carry hence a useless rage;
I hesitate no more; I must destroy her,
Or die myself. Come. Calchas shall know all.

A C T V.

Scene 1.

IPHIGENIA, ÆGINA.

IPHIGENIA.

Hinder me not, Ægina. To the queen
Go back; the wrathful Gods must be appeased.
In wishing to deprive them of my blood,
Look what a storm they rouse, ready to fall;
Consider how my mother needs your care;
See how our flight is block'd by all the army,
With what insulting gestures everywhere
They flash their spear-points in our very faces.
Our guards have been repulsed,—the queen has fainted—
Ah! 'tis too great a risk: detain me not:
Why should I here await her feeble succour?
Leave me to take advantage of this swoon.
My father too, if I must tell the truth,
E'en while he saves my life, tells me to die.

ÆGINA.

Your father, Madam! Why, what then has happen'd?

IPHIGENIA.

Achilles, in his zeal, may to the king
Have giv'n offence; and he would have me share
His hatred, and commands my heart to make
This sacrifice. Arcas convey'd his wishes.
Ægina, he forbids me e'er again
To breathe his name.

ÆGINA.

Ah, Madam!

IPHIGENIA.

Cruel sentence!
The gods are kinder, they but ask my life!

Then let me die.

But who is this I see?
Heav'ns! 'tis Achilles!

Scene 2.

ACHILLES, IPHIGENIA.

ACHILLES.

Madam, follow me;
Fear not the clamour of the crowd who press
Around this tent, they bay but cannot bite.
Face them, and, without waiting for my arm
To strike, these roaring billows will be parted
To give you passage. See, Patroclus brings,
With other captains in my train, the flower
Of my Thessalian troops. Around my standard
The rest are gather'd, with a wall of iron
To guard you. There take refuge from the storm
Of persecution: 'neath Achilles' tent
Let Calchas find you.

What! And is it thus
You welcome timely aid, tears the solo answer
To my appeal? Still look you for support
To arms so weak? Delay not; tears already
Have fail'd to move your sire.

IPHIGENIA.

I know it well,
And in the death I am resolved to meet
Lies my last hope.

ACHILLES.

Death! Speak not of your death.
Think of the oath which binds us to each other;
And, to cut short such foolish words, believe me,
My happiness depends upon your life.

IPHIGENIA.

Nay, to a life so darken'd by misfortune
II. O

Heav'n has not join'd Achilles' happiness.
Our love deceived us; and, by Fate's decree,
My death will make you happier than my life.
Think of the honours to be reap'd, my lord,
Which Victory offers to your valiant arm;
That field of fame to which you all aspire
Is barren, if not water'd with my blood.
Thus to my father have the gods pronounced
Their will: and, deaf to Calchas, he in vain
Struggled against it. Greece, with one consent,
Confirms the voice of Heaven. Go to Troy;
I will not be a hindrance to your glory:
Redeem the credit of those oracles
That promise your heroic aid to Greece;
And turn your rage against her enemies.
Priam grows pale already, and 'Troy trembles,
Dreading my death, in terror at your tears.
Go; and, within her walls, of men bereft,
Make Trojan widows wail and weep for me:
This prospect lets me die calm and content.
If life with my Achilles is denied me,
I hope at least, in happier times to come,
My memory to your immortal deeds
May cling, my death the fountain of your fame,
Wherewith the stirring story shall begin.
Farewell, dear prince, live worthy of the gods
From whom you spring.

ACHILLES.

No, no, we part not thus.
In spite of cruel words, you cannot wish
To serve your father by the sacrifice
Of love like mine: vainly, to death devoted,
You try to make me leave you to your doom,
For glory's sake. In serving you, ambition
Finds honours and renown ready to hand.
And what could win my favour, if your safety
Be not secured by our intended marriage?
My glory, no less than my love, says—Live!
Come, trust them, and, dear damsel, follow me.

IPHIGENIA.

Who? I, a rebel to my father's orders,
Worthy to die the death that I would shun!
Shall I so disregard my highest duty—

•

ACHILLES.

You will but trust yourself to one whose claims
Were sanction'd by himself. He shall not rob me
Of what he once bestow'd. Are oaths by him
Made to be broken? Was he not your father
What time he made you mine, to be obey'd
As strictest duty bids? Why do you heed him
Only when he has ceased to recognize
His child? Too long you linger, and my fears—

IPHIGENIA.

Surely, my lord, you will not use constraint?
Let not the warmth of passion so mislead you.
You surely would not add to my afflictions
This crowning ill, holding in less esteem
My honour than my life! Spare me, my lord!
Subject to orders I am bound t' obey,
Too long, Sir, have I listen'd to your voice;
It were unfair to press your victory
Farther; or else, by my own hands set free
From danger of the succour you propose,
I would prefer self-slaughter to disgrace.

ACHILLES.

Ah, cruel maid! I say no more. Obey,
And seek a death you deem so glorious:
Offer your sire a heart wherein I read
Hatred for me more than respect for him.
Just indignation fires my soul with fury:
If you must to the altar go, then I
Will thither hie me too. If Heaven thirsts
For blood, its altars never will have reek'd
With more. To my blind love naught shall be sacred;
The priest himself shall be the foremost victim;

The funeral pyre by me thrown down, destroy'd,
Shall in the blood of the vile butchers swim ;
And if, amid the carnage and confusion,
Your father should be wounded, fall, and perish,
Then, seeing the sad fruits of your respect,
Take to yourself the blame for every blow.

IPHIGENIA.

Cruel Achilles !—He has fled and left me !
Smitc, ye just gods who have decreed my death,
Lo, here am I alone ; end with my life
This terror, and me only overwhelm.

Scene 3.

CLYTEMNESTRA, IPHIGENIA, EURYBATES, ÆGINA,

GUARDS.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

Yes, I'll defend her against all the host,
Cowards, will ye betray your injured queen ?

EURYBATES.

No, Madam ; 'tis enough for us that you
Have giv'n command, and you shall see us fight
Till at your feet we fall. But what can hands
So weak avail ? Against so many foes
Who can defend you ? 'Tis no idle crowd
Raising a tumult, but the fatal zeal
Of the whole camp, where Calchas reigns despotic.
Pity is banish'd and severe religion
Its offering claims. The King sees himself stript
Of pow'r, and bids us to the torrent yield.
Invincible Achilles would himself
Vainly oppose his valour to this storm.
What will he do ? Who can disperse these waves,
Foaming with rage, all ready to engulf him ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

On me then let their impious zeal be proved,
And rob me of what little life is left !
Death, death alone can burst the knotted bands
With which these arms of mine would fain unite us :
My body shall be parted from my soul,
Ere I will ever suffer—Ah, my child !

IPHIGENIA.

Under what baleful planet did you bear
Th' unhappy object of a love so tender !
What can you do in our forlorn estate ?
How can you struggle against gods and men ?
Will you confront an angry multitude ?
Ah, go not to a camp that has revolted
Against your husband, nor alone resist
Their will, lest, haled in an unseemly manner
By soldiers' hands, you offer to mine eyes,
As fruit of wasted efforts, a worse sight
Than death itself. Go ; let the Greeks complete
Their work, and quit this doleful shore for ever ;
Linger not near, or on your eye may strike
The flame uprising from the pyre that waits me.
And, mother, if you love me, above all
Never reproach my father with my death.

CLYTEMNESTRA.

By whom your heart, offered to cruel Calchas,—

IPHIGENIA.

What efforts to restore me to your tears
Has he not made ?

CLYTEMNESTRA.

What treason left untried
To trick me ?

IPHIGENIA.

He but renders to the gods
The gift they gave. My death bereaves you not

Of all the pledges of your mutual love :
 Your eyes will see my image in Orestes.
 Ah, may he prove less fatal to his mother !
 You hear the cries of an impatient people ;
 Open your arms that in a last embrace
 Our lips may meet. Take courage.—
To the altar,
 Eurybates, conduct the willing victim.

Scene 4.

CLYTÆMNESTRA, ÆGINA, GUARDS.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

You shall not go alone ; I am determined—
 But crowds press forward to arrest my steps.
 Traitors ! Come, gratify your thirst for blood.

ÆGINA.

What would you do, dear Madam ? Whither haste you ?

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

Alas ! I waste my strength in fruitless efforts,
 Rising from anguish but to sink again.
 How can I die so often and yet live ?

ÆGINA.

Ah, Madam, know you whose the crime, and whose
 The treason ? Know you what ungrateful serpent
 Iphigenia cherish'd in her bosom ?
 'Twas Eriphyle, by yourself brought hither,
 And none but she, who to the Greeks betray'd
 Your flight.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

The monster ! offspring of Megæra !
 Cast out of hell to harbour in our arms !
 What ! Wilt not die ! To punish crimes so foul—

But where shall indignation seek a victim?
Wilt thou not, placid sea, vast gulfs disclose,
To whelm a thousand vessels with their crews?
When Aulis, casting up that guilty fleet,
Shall drive it forth out of the port that hides it,
Will not those self-same winds, so long accused,
Cover thy surface o'er with shatter'd ships?
And thou, O Sun, who in this land dost see
And know the genuine son and rightful heir
Of Agreus, thou who didst refuse to light
The father's feast, go back, as they have taught thee.
Meanwhile (immortal gods! unhappy mother!)
My daughter, crown'd with hateful chaplet, bares
Her throat, and in her father's hands are knives.
See Calchas treads on blood—Barbarians, stop;
That blood is drawn from him who wields the lightning—
I hear the thunder roar, feel the earth shake:—
Another crash! A god comes swift revenge to take.

Scene 5.

CLYTÆMNESTRA, ÆGINA, ARCAS, GUARDS.

ARCAS

Doubt it not, Madam, a god fights for you;
Achilles even now answers your pray'rs.
He, forcing the weak barrier of the Greeks,
Stands at the altar. Calchas is dismay'd,
The fatal sacrifice is interrupted;
The air resounds with threats, and to and fro
Men run with flashing swords; around your child
Achilles musters all his friends, devoted
To save her. Agamemnon, loath to own
His grief (whether to hide his eyes from that
He dreads to see, or to conceal his tears),
Covers his face. Come, speak while he is silent,
And with wise words support your brave defender.
He longs with his own hand, deep dyed in blood,
To give you back unharm'd the maid he loves;

Himself he charged me to conduct your steps.
Fear nothing.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

Fear, say you? Ah, let us hasten!
I dread no danger, will go anywhere—
But, O ye gods, do I not see Ulysses?
'Tis he: my child is dead! Too late, too late!

Scene 6.

ULYSSES, CLYTÆMNESTRA, ARCAS, ÆGINA, GUARDS.

ULYSSES.

No, your child lives; the gods are satisfied.
Be of good cheer; Heav'n deigns to give her back.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

She lives! And is it you who tell me so?

ULYSSES.

Yes, it is I, who long against you both
Have thought it right to steel your husband's heart:
Who, jealous of the honour of our arms,
By counsels stern have caused your tears to flow;
Who come, since Heav'n is now at last appeas'd,
To heal the wound that I crewhile inflicted.

CLYTÆMNESTRA.

My child! Good Heav'ns! Marvel most astounding!
Ah, prince, what god restores her to my arms?

ULYSSES.

You see me, Madam, at this happy moment
Struck with religious awe, with joy and rapture.
Never did day appear to Greece more fatal.
Discord, already mistress in the camp,
Had spread a fatal blindness over all,

And given the dread signal for the conflict.
Your daughter, at the horrid sight alarm'd,
Saw the whole host against her, on her side
Achilles, only he, but arm'd with fury
That daunted all and gave the gods themselves
Divided counsels. In the air arose
A cloud of arrows ; blood already flow'd,
First-fruits of carnage ; Calchas in the midst
Stepp'd forth ; stern was his look, his bristling hair
And wild eyes show'd him master'd by the god.
He cried : " Achilles, hear me, hear ye Greeks !
The god who by my voice now speaks to you
Explains his oracle, declares his choice.
Another child of Helen's blood, another
Iphigenia must be sacrificed
Here on this shore. Helen, erst carried off
By Theseus, was with him in secret wedlock
Soon after join'd, and from that union sprang
A daughter, whom her mother hid ; her name
Iphigenia. I myself then saw
The infant, and foretold disaster dire
Threatening her future. Under a false name
Has Fate and her own madness brought her hither.
She sees me, hears me, is before your eyes :
Yes, she it is whose life the gods demand."

Thus Calchas speaks. In silence and in awe
All listening stand, and look on Eriphyle.
She was beside the altar, in her heart
Perhaps impatient for the sacrifice :
For she herself had gone with hasty steps
To tell the Grecian leaders of your flight.
All wonder at her birth and destiny ;
But, since the sack of Troy hangs on her death,
The army with loud voice declare against her,
And ratify the prophet's fatal sentence.
Already Calchas lifts his arm to seize her.
" Stop there," she cries, " approach me not. The blood
Of heroes whom you make my ancestors
Needs not your impious hands to give it exit ;"
Then, springing wildly to the altar, snatches
The sacred knife, and plunges it amain

Into her breast. Scarce has her life's blood dyed
The earth, when peals of thunder from the gods
Are heard, auspiciously the rustling winds
Begin to blow, the roaring sea responds,
And the white breakers on the distant shore
Make moan; self-kindled flames the funeral pyre;
The heav'ns are open'd, and the lightning's flash
Inspires a holy awe, that reassures
Our hearts. Some say that, riding on a cloud,
Diana to the blazing pile descended,
That, rising then above the flames once more,
She bore to Heav'n our incense and our pray'rs.
All is astir—soon all are gone. Your daughter,
Amid the general joy, alone deplores
Her enemy. Go, from her father's hands
Receive her: longing to see you again,
He and Achilles, henceforth reconciled,
Are ready to confirm the marriage contract.

CLYTÆMNESTEA.

How can the thanks I owe be paid to Heav'n,
And to Achilles meet reward be giv'n?

P H Æ D R A.

1677.

INTRODUCTION TO PHÆDRA.

THIS, the most popular of Racine's tragedies, was first presented on New Year's Day, 1677. It is avowedly an imitation of the "Hippolytus" of Euripides, and is indebted for many touches to Seneca's play founded on the same theme. The authority of Plutarch, in his "Life of Theseus," is followed, so far as relates to the exploits of that hero and his imprisonment in Epirus, upon which latter incident Racine has made so much depend; for it is only when believing the rumour of her husband's death that Phædra is induced to declare her passion to Hippolytus. The character of Aricia and the part she takes in the development of the plot may be said, in spite of his disclaimer, to be due to the invention of the modern poet; for though there was an ancient tradition to the effect that Hippolytus was wedded to a maiden of that name, it was said to have been after his restoration to life by Æsculapius, a story which Virgil has embodied in the Seventh Book of the "Æneid." The hero's own submission to those tender feelings which he professed to despise, if it somewhat impairs the sacred dignity of Diana's votary as made familiar to us by Euripides, nevertheless brings him more within the range of human sympathy and interest. In rousing the furious jealousy of Phædra, Racine has supplied an adequate motive for her silent compliance in Cénone's offer to shield her mistress at the expense of Hippolytus. It was a decided improvement upon the older versions of the tale to make the Nurse and not Phædra herself the author of the calumny which brought the innocent son of Theseus to his death. In the tragedy of Euripides the false charge against Hippolytus is conveyed in a letter attached to Phædra's corpse; in that of Seneca it is uttered by her own lips, though afterwards retracted. According to the Greek tragedian, Phædra hanged herself before the arrival of Theseus, to whom Artemis (Diana) at last reveals the truth; the Latin author makes her thrust a sword into her heart after full confession of her guilt. In Racine's play she dies by poison which she has taken before exonerating Hippolytus.

CHARACTERS.

THESEUS, *Son of Ægeus and King of Athens.*

PHÆDRA, *Wife of Theseus and Daughter of Minos and Pasiphar.*

HIPPOLYTUS, *Son of Theseus and Antiope, Queen of the Amazons.*

ARICIA, *Princess of the Blood Royal of Athens.*

CENONE, *Nurse of Phædra.*

THERAMENES, *Tutor of Hippolytus.*

ISMENE, *Bosom Friend of Aricia.*

PANOPE, *Waiting-woman of Phædra.*

Guards.

The scene is laid at Trœzen, a town of the Peloponnesus.

PHÆDRA.

ACT I.

Scene 1.

HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES.

HIPPOLYTUS.

My mind is settled, dear Theramenes,
And I can stay no more in lovely Træzen.
In doubt that racks my soul with mortal anguish,
I grow ashamed of such long idleness.
Six months and more my father has been gone,
And what may have befallen one so dear
I know not, nor what corner of the earth
Hides him.

THERAMENES.

And where, prince, will you look for him?
Already, to content your just alarm,
Have I not cross'd the seas on either side
Of Corinth, ask'd if aught were known of Theseus
Where Acheron is lost among the Shades,
Visited Elis, doubled Tœnarus,
And sail'd into the sea that saw the fall
Of Icarus? Inspired with what new hope,
Under what favour'd skies think you to trace
His footsteps? Who knows if the King, your father,
Wishes the secret of his absence known?
Perchance, while we are trembling for his life,
The hero calmly plots some fresh intrigue,
And only waits till the deluded fair—

HIPPOLYTUS.

Cease, dear Theramenes, respect the name
Of Theseus. Youthful errors have been left
Behind, and no unworthy obstacle
Detains him. Phædra long has fix'd a heart
Inconstant once, nor need she fear a rival.
In seeking him I shall but do my duty,
And leave a place I dare no longer see.

THERAMENES.

Indeed! When, prince, did you begin to dread
These peaceful haunts, so dear to happy childhood,
Where I have seen you oft prefer to stay,
Rather than meet the tumult and the pomp
Of Athens and the court? What danger shun you,
Or shall I say what grief?

HIPPOLYTUS.

That happy time
Is gone, and all is changed, since to these shores
The gods sent Phædra.

THERAMENES.

I perceive the cause
Of your distress. It is the queen whose sight
Offends you. With a step-dame's spite she schemed
Your exile soon as she set eyes on you.
But if her hatred is not wholly vanish'd,
It has at least taken a milder aspect.
Besides, what danger can a dying woman,
One too who longs for death, bring on your head?
Can Phædra, sick'ning of a dire disease
Of which she will not speak, weary of life
And of herself, form any plots against you?

HIPPOLYTUS.

It is not her vain enmity I fear
Another foe alarms Hippolytus.

I fly, it must be own'd, from young Aricia,
The sole survivor of an impious race.

THERAMENES.

What! You become her persecutor too!
The gentle sister of the cruel sons
Of Pallas shared not in their perfidy;
Why should you hate such charming innocence?

HIPPOLYTUS.

I should not need to fly, if it were hatred.

THERAMENES.

May I then learn the meaning of your flight?
Is this the proud Hippolytus I see,
Than whom there breathed no fiercer foe to love
And to that yoke which Theseus has so oft
Endured? And can it be that Venus, scorn'd
So long, will justify your sire at last?
Has she, then, setting you with other mortals,
Forced e'en Hippolytus to offer incense
Before her? Can you love?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Friend, ask me not.

You, who have known my heart from infancy
And all its feelings of disdainful pride,
Spare me the shame of disavowing all
That I profess'd. Born of an Amazon,
The wildness that you wonder at I suck'd
With mother's milk. When come to riper age,
Reason approved what Nature had implanted.
Sincerely bound to me by zealous service,
You told me then the story of my sire,
And know how oft, attentive to your voice,
I kindled when I heard his noble acts,
As you described him bringing consolation
To mortals for the absence of Alcides,
The highways clear'd of monsters and of robbers,
Procrustes, Cercyon, Sciro, Sinnis slain,

The Epidaurian giant's bones dispersed,
Crete reeking with the blood of Minotaur.
But when you told me of less glorious deeds,
Troth plighted here and there and everywhere,
Young Helen stolen from her home at Sparta,
And Peribœa's tears in Salamis,
With many another trusting heart deceived
Whose very names have 'scaped his memory,
Forsaken Ariadne to the rocks
Complaining, last this Phædra, bound to him
By better ties,—you know with what regret
I heard and urged you to cut short the tale,
Happy had I been able to erase
From my remembrance that unworthy part
Of such a splendid record. I, in turn,
Am I too made the slave of love, and brought
To stoop so low? The more contemptible
That no renown is mine such as exalts
The name of Theseus, that no monsters quell'd
Have given me a right to share his weakness.
And if my pride of heart must needs be humbled,
Aricia should have been the last to tame it.
Was I beside myself to have forgotten
Eternal barriers of separation
Between us? By my father's stern command
Her brethren's blood must ne'er be reinforced
By sons of hers; he dreads a single shoot
From stock so guilty, and would fain with her
Bury their name, that, even to the tomb
Content to be his ward, for her no torch
Of Hymen may be lit. Shall I espouse
Her rights against my sire, rashly provoke
His wrath, and launch upon a mad career—

THERAMENES.

The gods, dear prince, if once your hour is come,
Care little for the reasons that should guide us.
Wishing to shut your eyes, Theseus unseals them;
His hatred, stirring a rebellious flame
Within you, lends his enemy new charms.

And, after all, why should a guiltless passion
Alarm you? Dare you not essay its sweetness,
But follow rather a fastidious scruple?
Fear you to stray where Hercules has wander'd?
What heart so stout that Venus has not vanquish'd?
Where would you be yourself, so long her foe,
Had your own mother, constant in her scorn
Of love, ne'er glowed with tenderness for Theseus?
What boots it to affect a pride you feel not?
Confess it, all is changed; for some time past
You have been seldom seen with wild delight
Urging the rapid car along the strand,
Or, skilful in the art that Neptune taught,
Making th' unbroken steed obey the bit;
Less often have the woods return'd our shouts;
A secret burden on your spirits cast
Has dimm'd your eye. How can I doubt you love?
Vainly would you conceal the fatal wound.
Has not the fair Aricia touch'd your heart?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Theramenes, I go to find my father.

THERAMENES.

Will you not see the queen before you start,
My prince?

HIPPOLYTUS.

That is my purpose: you can tell her.
Yes, I will see her; duty bids me do it.
But what new ill vexes her dear CEnone?

Scene 2.

HIPPOLYTUS, CENONE, THERAMENES.

CENONE.

Alas, my lord, what grief was e'er like mine?
The queen has almost touch'd the gates of death.
Vainly close watch I keep by day and night,

E'en in my arms a secret malady
Slays her, and all her senses are disorder'd.
Weary yet restless from her couch she rises,
Pants for the outer air, but bids me see
That no one on her misery intrudes.
She comes.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Enough. She shall not be disturb'd,
Nor be confronted with a face she hates.

Scene 3.

PHÆDRA, CENONE.

PHÆDRA.

We have gone far enough. Stay, dear CEnone;
Strength fails me, and I needs must rest awhile.
My eyes are dazzled with this glaring light
So long unseen, my trembling knees refuse
Support. Ah me!

CENONE.

Would Heaven that our tears
Might bring relief!

PHÆDRA.

Ah, how these cumbrous gauds,
These veils oppress me! What officious hand
Has tied these knots, and gather'd o'er my brow
These clustering coils? How all conspires to add
To my distress!

CENONE.

What is one moment wish'd,
The next, is irksome. Did you not just now,
Sick of inaction, bid us deck you out,
And, with your former energy recall'd,
Desire to go abroad, and see the light
Of day once more? You see it, and would fain
Be hidden from the sunshine that you sought.

PHÆDRA.

Thou glorious author of a hapless race,
Whose daughter 'twas my mother's boast to be,
Who well may'st blush to see me in such plight,
For the last time I come to look on thee,
O Sun!

CENONE.

What! Still are you in love with death?
Shall I ne'er see you, reconciled to life,
Forego these cruel accents of despair?

PHÆDRA.

•Would I were seated in the forest's shade!
When may I follow with delighted eye,
Thro' glorious dust flying in full career,
A chariot—

CENONE.

Madam?

PHÆDRA.

Have I lost my senses?
What said I? and where am I? Whither stray
Vain wishes? Ah! The gods have made me mad.
I blush, Cēnone, and confusion covers
My face, for I have let you see too clearly
The shame and grief that, in my own despite,
O'erflow these eyes of mine.

CENONE.

If you must blush,
Blush at a silence that inflames your woes.
Resisting all my care, deaf to my voice,
Will you have no compassion on yourself,
But let your life be ended in mid course?
What evil spell has drain'd its fountain dry?
Thrice have the shades of night obscured the heav'ns
Since sleep has enter'd thro' your eyes, and thrice
The dawn has chased the darkness thence, since food
Pass'd your wan lips, and you are faint and languid

To what dread purpose is your heart inclined?
How dare you make attempts upon your life,
And so offend the gods who gave it you,
Prove false to Theseus and your marriage vows,
Ay, and betray your most unhappy children,
Bending their necks yourself beneath the yoke?
That day, be sure, which robs them of their mother,
Will give high hopes back to the stranger's son,
To that proud enemy of you and yours,
To whom an Amazon gave birth, I mean
Hippolytus—

PHÆDRA.

Ye gods!

ÆNONE.

Ah, this reproach

Moves you!

PHÆDRA.

Unhappy woman, to what name
Gave your mouth utterance?

ÆNONE.

Your wrath is just.
'Tis well that that ill-omen'd name can rouse
Such rage. Then live. Let love and duty urge
Their claims. Live, suffer not this son of Scythia,
Crushing your children 'neath his odious sway,
To rule the noble offspring of the gods,
The purest blood of Greece. Make no delay;
Each moment threatens death; quickly restore
Your shatter'd strength, while yet the torch of life
Holds out, and can be fann'd into a flame.

PHÆDRA.

Too long have I endured its guilt and shame!

ÆNONE.

Why? What remorse gnaws at your heart? What crime
Can have disturb'd you thus? Your hands are not
Polluted with the blood of innocence?

PHÆDRA.

Thanks be to Heav'n, my hands are free from stain.
Would that my soul were innocent as they !

CENONE.

What awful project have you then conceived,
Whereat your conscience should be still alarm'd ?

PHÆDRA.

Have I not said enough ? Spare me the rest.
I die to save myself a full confession.

CENONE.

Die then, and keep a silence so inhuman ;
But seek some other hand to close your eyes.
Tho' but a spark of life remains within you,
My soul shall go before you to the Shades.
A thousand roads are always open thither ;
Pain'd at your want of confidence, I'll choose
The shortest. Cruel one, when has my faith
Deceived you ? Think how in my arms you lay
New born. For you, my country and my children
I have forsaken. Do you thus repay
My faithful service ?

PHÆDRA.

What do you expect
From words so bitter ? Were I to break silence,
Horror would freeze your blood.

CENONE.

What can you say
To horrify me more than to behold
You die before my eyes ?

PHÆDRA.

When you shall know
My crime, my death will follow none the less,
But with the added stain of guilt.

CENONE.

Dear Madam,

By all the tears that I have shed for you,
By these weak knees I clasp, relieve my mind
From torturing doubt.

PHÆDRA.

It is your wish. Then rise.

CENONE.

I hear you. Speak.

PHÆDRA.

Heav'ns! How shall I begin?

CENONE.

Dismiss vain fears, you wound me with distrust.

PHÆDRA.

O fatal animosity of Venus!
Into what wild distractions did she cast
My mother!

CENONE.

Be they blotted from remembrance,
And for all time to come buried in silence.

PHÆDRA.

My sister Ariadne, by what love
Were you betray'd to death, on lonely shores
Forsaken!

CENONE.

Madam, what deep-seated pain
Prompts these reproaches against all your kin?

PHÆDRA.

It is the will of Venus, and I perish,
Last, most unhappy of a family
Where all were wretched.

CENONE.

Do you love?

PHÆDRA.

I feel

All its mad fever.

CENONE.

Ah! For whom?

PHÆDRA.

Hear now

The crowning horror. Yes, I love—my lips
Tremble to say his name.

CENONE.

Whom?

PHÆDRA.

Know you him,

Son of the Amazon, whom I've oppress'd
So long?

CENONE.

Hippolytus? Great gods!

PHÆDRA.

'Tis you

Have named him.

CENONE.

All my blood within my veins
Seems frozen. O despair! O cursèd race!
Ill-omen'd journey! Land of misery!
Why did we ever reach thy dangerous shores?

PHÆDRA.

My wound is not so recent. Scarcely had I
Been bound to Theseus by the marriage yoke,
And happiness and peace seem'd well secured,

When Athens show'd me my proud enemy.
I look'd, alternately turn'd pale and blush'd
To see him, and my soul grew all distraught;
A mist obscured my vision, and my voice
Falter'd, my blood ran cold, then burn'd like fire;
Venus I felt in all my fever'd frame,
Whose fury had so many of my race
Pursued. With fervent vows I sought to shun
Her torments, built and deck'd for her a shrine,
And there, 'mid countless victims did I seek
The reason I had lost; but all for naught,
No remedy could cure the wounds of love!
In vain I offer'd incense on her altars;
When I invoked her name my heart adored
Hippolytus, before me constantly;
And when I made her altars smoke with victims,
'Twas for a god whose name I dared not utter.
I fled his presence everywhere, but found him—
O crowning horror!—in his father's features.
Against myself, at last, I raised revolt,
And stirr'd my courage up to persecute
The enemy I loved. To banish him
I wore a step-dame's harsh and jealous carriage,
With ceaseless cries I clamour'd for his exile,
Till I had torn him from his father's arms.
I breathed once more, CEnone; in his absence
My days flow'd on less troubled than before,
And innocent. Submissive to my husband,
I hid my grief, and of our fatal marriage
Cherish'd the fruits. Vain caution! Cruel Fate!
Brought hither by my spouse himself, I saw
Again the enemy whom I had banish'd,
And the old wound too quickly bled afresh.
No longer is it love hid in my heart,
But Venus in her might seizing her prey.
I have conceived just terror for my crime;
I hate my life, and hold my love in horror.
Dying I wish'd to keep my fame unsullied,
And bury in the grave a guilty passion;
But I have been unable to withstand
Tears and entreaties, I have told you all;

Content, if only, as my end draws near,
You do not vex me with unjust reproaches,
Nor with vain efforts seek to snatch from death
The last faint lingering sparks of vital breath.

Scene 4.

PHÆDRA, CENONE, PANOPE.

PANOPE.

Fain would I hide from you tidings so sad,
But 'tis my duty, Madam, to reveal them.
The hand of death has seized your peerless husband,
And you are last to hear of this disaster.

CENONE.

What say you, Panope?

PANOPE.

The queen, deceived
By a vain trust in Heav'n, begs safe return
For Theseus, while Hippolytus his son
Learns of his death from vessels that are now
In port.

PHÆDRA.

Ye gods!

PANOPE.

Divided counsels sway
The choice of Athens; some would have the prince,
Your child, for master; others, disregarding
The laws, dare to support the stranger's son.
'Tis even said that a presumptuous faction
Would crown Aricia and the house of Pallas.
I deem'd it right to warn you of this danger.
Hippolytus already is prepared
To start, and should he show himself at Athens,

'Tis to be fear'd the fickle crowd will all
Follow his lead.

CENONE.

Enough. The queen, who hears you,
By no means will neglect this timely warning.

Scene 5.

PHÆDRA, CENONE.

CENONE.

Dear lady, I had almost ceased to urge
The wish that you should live, thinking to follow
My mistress to the tomb, from which my voice
Had fail'd to turn you ; but this new misfortune
Alters the aspect of affairs, and prompts
Fresh measures. Madam, Theseus is no more,
You must supply his place. He leaves a son,
A slave, if you should die, but, if you live,
A King. On whom has he to lean but you ?
No hand but yours will dry his tears. Then live
For him, or else the tears of innocence
Will move the gods, his ancestors, to wrath
Against his mother. Live, your guilt is gone,
No blame attaches to your passion now.
The King's decease has freed you from the bonds
That made the crime and horror of your love.
Hippolytus no longer need be dreaded,
Him you may see henceforth without reproach.
It may be, that, convinced of your aversion,
He means to head the rebels. Undeceive him,
Soften his callous heart, and bend his pride.
King of this fertile land, in Trœzen here
His portion lies ; but as he knows, the laws
Give to your son the ramparts that Minerva
Built and protects. A common enemy
Threatens you both, unite then to oppose
Aricia.

PHÆDRA.

To your counsel I consent.
Yes, I will live, if life can be restored,
If my affection for a son has pow'r
To rouse my sinking heart at such a dangerous hour.

A C T II.

Scene 1.

ARICIA, ISMENE.

ARICIA.

Hippolytus request to see me here!
Hippolytus desire to bid farewell!
Is 't true, Ismene? Are you not deceived?

ISMENE.

This is the first result of Theseus' death.
Prepare yourself to see from every side
Hearts turn towards you that were kept away
By Theseus. Mistress of her lot at last,
Aricia soon shall find all Greece fall low,
To do her homage.

ARICIA.

'Tis not then, Ismene,
An idle tale? Am I no more a slave?
Have I no enemies?

ISMENE.

The gods oppose
Your peace no longer, and the soul of Theseus
Is with your brothers.

ARICIA.

Does the voice of fame
Tell how he died?

ISMENE.

Rumours incredible
Are spread. Some say that, seizing a new bride,
The faithless husband by the waves was swallow'd.
Others affirm, and this report prevails,
That with Pirithoüs to the world below
He went, and saw the shores of dark Cocytus,
Showing himself alive to the pale ghosts;
But that he could not leave those gloomy realms,
Which whoso enters there abides for ever.

ARICIA.

Shall I believe that ere his destined hour
A mortal may descend into the gulf
Of Hades? What attraction could o'ercome
Its terrors?

ISMENE.

He is dead, and you alone
Doubt it. The men of Athens mourn his loss.
Træzen already hails Hippolytus
As King. And Phædra, fearing for her son,
Asks counsel of the friends who share her trouble,
Here in this palace.

ARICIA.

Will Hippolytus,
Think you, prove kinder than his sire, make light
My chains, and pity my misfortunes?

ISMENE.

Yes,

I think so, Madam.

ARICIA.

Ah, you know him not
Or you would never deem so hard a heart
Can pity feel, or me alone except
From the contempt in which he holds our sex.
Has he not long avoided every spot
Where we resort?

ISMENE.

• I know what tales are told
Of proud Hippolytus, but I have seen
Him near you, and have watch'd with curious eye
How one esteem'd so cold would bear himself.
Little did his behaviour correspond
With what I look'd for ; in his face confusion
Appear'd at your first glance, he could not turn
His languid eyes away, but gazed on you.
Love is a word that may offend his pride,
But what the tongue disowns, looks can betray.

ARICIA.

• How eagerly my heart hears what you say,
Tho' it may be delusion, dear Ismene !
Did it seem possible to you, who know me,
That I, sad sport of a relentless Fate,
Fed upon bitter tears by night and day,
Could ever taste the maddening draught of love ?
The last frail offspring of a royal race,
Children of Earth, I only have survived
War's fury. Cut off in the flow'r of youth,
Mown by the sword, six brothers have I lost,
The hope of an illustrious house, whose blood
Earth drank with sorrow, near akin to his
Whom she herself produced. Since then, you know
How thro' all Greece no heart has been allow'd
To sigh for me, lest by a sister's flame
The brothers' ashes be perchance rekindled.
You know, besides, with what disdain I view'd
My conqueror's suspicions and precautions,
And how, opposed as I have ever been
To love, I often thank'd the King's injustice
Which happily confirm'd my inclination.
But then I never had beheld his son.
Not that, attracted merely by the eye,
I love him for his beauty and his grace,
Endowments which he owes to Nature's bounty,
Charms which he seems to know not or to scorn.
• I love and prize in him riches more rare,

The virtues of his sire, without his faults. *
I love, as I must own, that generous pride
Which ne'er has stoop'd beneath the amorous yoke.
Phædra reaps little glory from a lover
So lavish of his sighs ; I am too proud
To share devotion with a thousand others,
Or enter where the door is always open.
But to make one who ne'er has stoop'd before
Bend his proud neck, to pierce a heart of stone,
To bind a captive whom his chains astonish,
Who vainly 'gainst a pleasing yoke rebels,—
That piques my ardour, and I long for that.
'Twas easier to disarm the god of strength
Than this Hippolytus, for Hercules
Yielded so often to the eyes of beauty,
As to make triumph cheap. But, dear Ismene,
I take too little heed of opposition
Beyond my pow'r to quell, and you may hear me,
Humbled by sore defeat, upbraid the pride
I now admire. What! Can he love? and I
Have had the happiness to bend—

ISMENE.

He comes.

Yourself shall hear him.

Scene 2.

HIPPOLYTUS, ARICIA, ISMENE.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Lady, ere I go
My duty bids me tell you of your change
Of fortune. My worst fears are realized ;
My sire is dead. Yes, his protracted absence
Was caused as I foreboded. Death alone,
Ending his toils, could keep him from the world
Conceal'd so long. The gods at last have doom'd
Alcides' friend, companion, and successor.

I think your hatred, tender to his virtues,
 Can hear such terms of praise without resentment,
 Knowing them due. One hope have I that soothes
 My sorrow: I can free you from restraint.
 Lo, I revoke the laws whose rigour moved
 My pity; you are at your own disposal,
 Both heart and hand; here, in my heritage,
 In Træzen, where my grandsire Pittheus reign'd
 Of yore and I am now acknowledged King,
 I leave you free, free as myself,—and more.

ARICIA.

Your kindness is too great, 'tis overwhelming.
 Such generosity, that pays disgrace
 With honour, lends more force than you can think
 To those harsh laws from which you would release me.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Athens, uncertain how to fill the throne
 Of Theseus, speaks of you, anon of me,
 And then of Phædra's son.

ARICIA.

Of me, my lord?

HIPPOLYTUS.

I know myself excluded by strict law :
 Greece turns to my reproach a foreign mother.
 But if my brother were my only rival,
 My rights prevail o'er his clearly enough
 To make me careless of the law's caprice.
 My forwardness is check'd by juster claims :
 To you I yield my place, or, rather, own
 That it is yours by right, and yours the sceptre,
 As handed down from Earth's great son, Erechtheus.
 Adoption placed it in the hands of Ægeus :
 Athens, by him protected and increased,
 Welcomed a king so generous as my sire,
 And left your hapless brothers in oblivion.
 Now she invites you back within her walls;

Protracted strife has cost her groans enough,
Her fields are glutted with your kinsmen's blood
Fatt'ning the furrows out of which it sprung
At first. I rule this Troezen; while the son
Of Phædra has in Crete a rich domain.
Athens is yours. I will do all I can
To join for you the votes divided now
Between us.

ARICIA.

Stunn'd at all I hear, my lord,
I fear, I almost fear a dream deceives me.
Am I indeed awake? Can I believe
Such generosity? What god has put it
Into your heart? Well is the fame deserved
That you enjoy! That fame falls short of truth!
Would you for me prove traitor to yourself?
Was it not boon enough never to hate me,
So long to have abstain'd from harbouring
The enmity—

HIPPOLYTUS.

To hate you? I, to hate you?
However darkly my fierce pride was painted,
Do you suppose a monster gave me birth?
What savage temper, what envenom'd hatred
Would not be mollified at sight of you?
Could I resist the soul-bewitching charm—

ARICIA.

Why, what is this, Sir?

HIPPOLYTUS.

I have said too much
Not to say more. ~ Prudence in vain resists
The violence of passion. I have broken
Silence at last, and I must tell you now
The secret that my heart can hold no longer.

You see before you an unhappy instance
Of hasty pride, a prince who claims compassion
I, who, so long the enemy of Love,

Mock'd at his fetters and despised his captives,
Who, pitying poor mortals that were shipwreck'd,
In seeming safety view'd the storms from land,
Now find myself to the same fate exposed,
Toss'd to and fro upon a sea of troubles!
My boldness has been vanquish'd in a moment,
And humbled is the pride wherein I boasted.
For nearly six months past, ashamed, despairing,
Bearing where'er I go the shaft that rends
My heart, I struggle vainly to be free
From you and from myself; I shun you, present;
Absent, I find you near; I see your form
In the dark forest depths; the shades of night,
Nor less broad daylight, bring back to my view
The charms that I avoid; all things conspire
To make Hippolytus your slave. For fruit
Of all my bootless sighs, I fail to find
My former self. My bow and javelins
Please me no more, my chariot is forgotten,
With all the Sea God's lessons; and the woods
Echo my groans instead of joyous shouts
Urging my fiery steeds.

Hearing this tale
Of passion so uncouth, you blush perchance
At your own handiwork. With what wild words
I offer you my heart, strange captive held
By silken jess! But dearer in your eyes
Should be the offering that this language comes
Strange to my lips; reject not vows express'd
So ill, which but for you had ne'er been form'd.

Scene 3.

• HIPPOLYTUS, ARICIA, THERAMENES, ISMENE.

THERAMENES.

Prince, the Queen comes. I herald her approach.
'Tis you she seeks.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Me?

THERAMENES.

What her thought may be
I know not. But I speak on her behalf.
She would converse with you ere you go hence.

HIPPOLYTUS.

What shall I say to her? Can she expect—

ARICIA.

You cannot, noble Prince, refuse to hear her,
Howe'er convinced she is your enemy,
Some shade of pity to her tears is due.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Shall we part thus? and will you let me go,
Not knowing if my boldness has offended
The goddess I adore? Whether this heart,
Left in your hands—

ARICIA.

Go, Prince, pursue the schemes
Your generous soul dictates, make Athens own
My sceptre. All the gifts you offer me
Will I accept, but this high throne of empire
Is not the one most precious in my sight.

Scene 4.

HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Friend, is all ready?

But the Queen approaches.
Go, see the vessel in fit trim to sail.

Haste, bid the crew aboard, and hoist the signal ;
Then soon return, and so deliver me
From interview most irksome.

Scene 5.

PHÆDRA, HIPPOLYTUS, CENONE.

“ PHAEDRA (to CENONE).

There I see him !
My blood forgets to flow, my tongue to speak
What I am come to say.

CENONE.

Think of your son,
How all his hopes depend on you.

PHÆDRA.

I hear
You leave us, and in haste. I come to add
My tears to your distress, and for a son
Plead my alarm. No more has he a father,
And at no distant day my son must witness
My death. Already do a thousand foes
Threaten his youth. You only can defend him.
But in my secret heart remorse awakes,
And fear lest I have shut your ears against
His cries. I tremble lest your righteous anger
Visit on him ere long the hatred earn'd
By me, his mother.

HIPPOLYTUS. •

No such base resentment,
Madam, is mine.

PHÆDRA.

I could not blame you, Prince,
If you should hate me. I have injured you :
*So much you know, but could not read my heart.

T' incur your enmity has been mine aim :
The self-same borders could not hold us both ;
In public and in private I declared
Myself your foe, and found no peace till seas
Parted us from each other. I forbade
Your very name to be pronounced before me.
And yet if punishment should be proportion'd
To the offence, if only hatred draws
Your hatred, never woman merited
More pity, less deserved your enmity.

HIPPOLYTUS.

A mother jealous of her children's rights
Seldom forgives the offspring of a wife
Who reign'd before her. Harassing suspicions
Are common sequels of a second marriage.
Of me would any other have been jealous
No less than you, perhaps more violent.

PHÆDRA.

Ah, Prince, how Heav'n has from the general law
Made me exempt, be that same Heav'n my witness !
Far different is the trouble that devours me !

HIPPOLYTUS.

This is no time for self-reproaches, Madam.
It may be that your husband still beholds
The light, and Heav'n may grant him safe return,
In answer to our prayers. His guardian god
Is Neptune, ne'er by him invoked in vain.

PHÆDRA.

He who has seen the mansions of the dead
Returns not thence. Since to those gloomy shores
Theseus is gone, 'tis vain to hope that Heav'n
May send him back. Prince, there is no release
From Acheron's greedy maw. And yet, methinks,
He lives, and breathes in you. I see him still
Before me, and to him I seem to speak ;

My heart—

Oh! I am mad; do what I will,
I cannot hide my passion.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Yes, I see

The strange effects of love. Theseus, tho' dead,
Seems present to your eyes, for in your soul
There burns a constant flame.

PHÆDRA.

Ah, yes, for Theseus

I languish and I long, not as the Shades
Have seen him, of a thousand different forms
The fickle lover, and of Pluto's bride
The would-be ravisher, but faithful, proud
E'en to a slight disdain, with youthful charms
Attracting every heart, as gods are painted,
Or like yourself. He had your mien, your eyes,
Spoke and could blush like you, when to the isle
Of Crete, my childhood's home, he cross'd the waves,
Worthy to win the love of Minos' daughters.
What were you doing then? Why did he gather
The flow'r of Greece, and leave Hippolytus?
Oh, why were you too young to have embark'd
On board the ship that brought thy sire to Crete?
At your hands would the monster then have perish'd,
Despite the windings of his vast retreat.
To guide your doubtful steps within the maze
My sister would have arm'd you with the clue.
But no, therein would Phædra have forestall'd her,
Love would have first inspired me with the thought;
And I it would have been whose timely aid
Had taught you all the labyrinth's crooked ways.
What anxious care a life so dear had cost me!
No thread had satisfied your lover's fears:
I would myself have wish'd to lead the way,
And share the peril you were bound to face;
Phædra with you would have explored the maze,
With you emerged in safety, or have perish'd.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Gods! What is this I hear? Have you forgotten
That Theseus is my father and your husband?

PHÆDRA.

Why should you fancy I have lost remembrance
Thereof, and am regardless of mine honour?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Forgive me, Madam. With a blush I own
That I misconstrued words of innocence.
For very shame I cannot bear your sight
Longer. I go—

PHÆDRA.

Ah! cruel Prince, too well
You understood me. I have said enough
To save you from mistake. I love. But think not
That at the moment when I love you most
I do not feel my guilt; no weak compliance
Has fed the poison that infects my brain
The ill-starr'd object of celestial vengeance,
I am not so detestable to you
As to myself. The gods will bear me witness,
Who have within my veins kindled this fire,
The gods, who take a barbarous delight
In leading a poor mortal's heart astray.
Do you yourself recall to mind the past:
'Twas not enough for me to fly, I chased you
Out of the country, wishing to appear
Inhuman, odious; to resist you better,
I sought to make you hate me. All in vain!
Hating me more I loved you none the less:
New charms were lent to you by your misfortunes.
I have been drown'd in tears, and scorch'd by fire;
Your own eyes might convince you of the truth,
If for one moment you could look at me.
What is 't I say? Think you this vile confession
That I have made is what I meant to utter?
Not daring to betray a son for whom

I trembled, 'twas to beg you not to hate him
I came. Weak purpose of a heart too full
Of love for you to speak of aught besides !
Take your revenge, punish my odious passion ;
Prove yourself worthy of your valiant sire,
And rid the world of an offensive monster !
• Does Theseus' widow dare to love his son ?
The frightful monster ! Let her not escape you !
Here is my heart. This is the place to strike.
Already prompt to expiate its guilt,
I feel it leap impatiently to meet
Your arm. Strike home. Or, if it would disgrace you
To steep your hand in such polluted blood,
If that were punishment too mild to slake
• Your hatred, lend me then your sword, if not
Your arm. Quick, give 't.

CENONE.

What, Madam, will you do ?
Just gods ! But someone comes. Go, fly from shame,
You cannot 'scape if seen by any thus.

Scene 6.

HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES.

THERAMENES.

Is that the form of Phædra that I see
Hurried away ? What mean these signs of sorrow ?
Where is your sword ? Why are you pale, confused ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Friend, let us fly. I am, indeed, confounded
With horror and astonishment extreme.
Phædra—but no ; gods, let this dreadful secret
Remain for ever buried in oblivion.

THERAMENES.

The ship is ready if you wish to sail.
But Athens has already giv'n her vote ;
Their leaders have consulted all her tribes ;
Your brother is elected, Phædra wins

HIPPOLYTUS.

Phædra ?

THERAMENES.

A herald, charged with a commission
From Athens, has arrived to place the reins
Of power in her hands. Her son is King.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ye gods, who know her, do ye thus reward
Her virtue ?

THERAMENES.

A faint rumour meanwhile whispers
That Theseus is not dead, but in Epirus
Has shown himself. But, after all my search,
I know too well—

HIPPOLYTUS.

Let nothing be neglected.
This rumour must be traced back to its source.
If it be found unworthy of belief,
Let us set sail, and cost whate'er it may,
To hands deserving trust the sceptre's sway.

ACT III.

Scene 1.

PHÆDRA, CENONE.

PHÆDRA.

Ah! Let them take elsewhere the worthless honours
They bring me. Why so urgent I should see them?
What flattering balm can soothe my wounded heart?
Far rather hide me: I have said too much.
My madness has burst forth like streams in flood,
And I have utter'd what should ne'er have reach'd
His ear. Gods! How he heard me! How reluctant
To catch my meaning, dull and cold as marble,
And eager only for a quick retreat!
How oft his blushes made my shame the deeper!
Why did you turn me from the death I sought?
Ah! When his sword was pointed to my bosom,
Did he grow pale, or try to snatch it from me?
That I had touch'd it was enough for him
To render it for ever horrible,
Leaving defilement on the hand that holds it.

CENONE.

Thus brooding on your bitter disappointment,
You only fan a fire that must be stifled.
Would it not be more worthy of the blood
Of Minos to find peace in nobler cares,
And, in defiance of a wretch who flies
From what he hates, reign, mount the proffer'd throne?

PHÆDRA.

I reign! Shall I the rod of empire sway,
When reason reigns no longer o'er myself?
When I have lost control of all my senses?
When 'neath a shameful yoke I scarce can breathe?
When I am dying?

CENONE.

Fly.

PHÆDRA.

I cannot leave him.

CENONE.

Dare you not fly from him you dared to banish ?

PHÆDRA.

The time for that is past. He knows my frenzy.
I have o'erstepp'd the bounds of modesty,
And blazon'd forth my shame before his eyes.
Hope stole into my heart against my will.
Did you not rally my declining pow'rs ?
Was it not you yourself recall'd my soul
When fluttering on my lips, and with your counsel,
Lent me fresh life, and told me I might love him ?

CENONE.

Blame me or blame me not for your misfortunes,
Of what was I incapable, to save you ?
But if your indignation e'er was roused
By insult, can you pardon his contempt ?
How cruelly his eyes, severely fix'd,
Survey'd you almost prostrate at his feet !
How hateful then appear'd his savage pride !
Why did not Phædra see him then as I
Beheld him ?

PHÆDRA.

This proud mood that you resent
May yield to time. The rudeness of the forests
Where he was bred, inured to rigorous laws,
Clings to him still ; love is a word he ne'er
Had heard before. It may be his surprise
Stunn'd him, and too much vehemence was shown
In all I said.

CENONE.

Remember that his mother
Was a barbarian.

PHÆDRA.

Scythian tho' she was,
She learnt to love.

CENONE.

He has for all the sex
Hatred intense.

PHÆDRA.

Then in his heart no rival
Shall ever reign. Your counsel comes too late.
Cenone, serve my madness, not my reason.
His heart is inaccessible to love:
Let us attack him where he has more feeling.
The charms of sovereignty appear'd to touch him;
He could not hide that he was drawn to Athens;
His vessels' prows were thither turn'd already,
All sail was set to scud before the breeze.
Go you on my behalf, to his ambition
Appeal, and let the prospect of the crown
Dazzle his eyes. The sacred diadem
Shall deck his brow, no higher honour mine
Than there to bind it. His shall be the pow'r
I cannot keep; and he shall teach my son
How to rule men. It may be he will deign
To be to him a father. Son and mother
He shall control. Try ev'ry means to move him;
Your words will find more favour than can mine.
Urge him with groans and tears; show Phædra dying,
Nor blush to use the voice of supplication.
In you is my last hope; I'll sanction all
You say; and on the issue hangs my fate.

*Scene 2.*PHÆDRA (*alone*).

Venus implacable, who seest me shamed
And sore confounded, have I not enough
Been humbled? How can cruelty be stretch'd
Farther? Thy shafts have all gone home, and thou
Hast triumph'd. Would'st thou win a new renown?
Attack an enemy more contumacious:
Hippolytus neglects thee, braves thy wrath,
Nor ever at thine altars bow'd the knee.
Thy name offends his proud, disdainful ears.
Our interests are alike: avenge thyself,
Force him to love—

But what is this? CEnone
Return'd already? He detests me then,
And will not hear you.

Scene 3.

PHÆDRA, CEnONE.

CEnONE.

Madam, you must stifle
A fruitless love. Recall your former virtue:
The king who was thought dead will soon appear
Before your eyes, Theseus has just arrived,
Theseus is here. The people flock to see him
With eager haste. I went by your command
To find the prince, when with a thousand shouts
The air was rent—

PHÆDRA.

My husband is alive,
That is enough, CEnone. I have own'd
A passion that dishonours him. He lives:
I ask to know no more.

CENONE.

What?

PHÆDRA.

I foretold it,
But you refused to hear. Your tears prevail'd
Over my just remorse. Dying this morn,
I had deserved compassion; your advice
I took, and die dishonour'd.

CENONE.

Die?

PHÆDRA.

Just Heav'ns!

What have I done to-day? My husband comes,
With him his son: and I shall see the witness
Of my adulterous flame watch with what face
I greet his father, while my heart is big
With sighs he scorn'd, and tears that could not move him
Moisten mine eyes. Think you that his respect
For Theseus will induce him to conceal
My madness, nor disgrace his sire and king?
Will he be able to keep back the horror
He has for me? His silence would be vain.
I know my treason, and I lack the boldness
Of those abandon'd women who can taste
Tranquillity in crime, and show a forehead
All unabash'd. I recognize my madness,
Recall it all. These vaulted roofs, methinks,
These walls can speak, and, ready to accuse me,
Wait but my husband's presence to reveal
My perfidy. Death only can remove
This weight of horror. Is it such misfortune
To cease to live? Death causes no alarm
To misery. I only fear the name
That I shall leave behind me. For my sons
How sad a heritage! The blood of Jove
Might justly swell the pride that boasts descent

From Heav'n, but heavy weighs a mother's guilt
Upon her offspring. Yes, I dread the scorn
That will be cast on them with too much truth,
For my disgrace. I tremble when I think
That, crush'd beneath that curse, they'll never dare
To raise their eyes.

CENONE.

Doubt not I pity both ;
Never was fear more just than yours. Why then
Expose them to this ignominy ? Why
Will you accuse yourself ? You thus destroy
The only hope that's left ; it will be said
That Phædra, conscious of her perfidy,
Fled from her husband's sight. Hippolytus
Will be rejoiced that, dying, you should lend
His charge support. What can I answer him ?
He'll find it easy to confute my tale,
And I shall hear him with an air of triumph
To every open ear repeat your shame.
Sooner than that may fire from heav'n consume me !
Deceive me not. Say, do you love him still ?
How look you now on this contemptuous prince ?

PHÆDRA.

As on a monster frightful to mine eyes.

CENONE.

Why yield him then an easy victory ?
You fear him. Venture to accuse him first,
As guilty of the charge which he may bring
This day against you. Who can say 'tis false ?
All tells against him : in your hands his sword
Happily left behind, your present trouble,
Your past distress, your warnings to his father,
His exile which your earnest pray'rs obtain'd.

PHÆDRA.

What ! Would you have me slander innocence ?

CENONE.

My zeal has need of naught from you but silence.
 Like you I tremble, and am loath to do it ;
 More willingly I'd face a thousand deaths.
 But since without this bitter remedy
 I lose you, and to me your life outweighs
 All else, I'll speak. Theseus, howe'er enraged,
 Will do no worse than banish him again.
 A father, when he punishes, remains
 A father, and his ire is satisfied
 With a light sentence. But if guiltless blood
 Should flow, is not your honour of more moment ?
 A treasure far too precious to be risk'd ?
 You must submit, whatever it dictates ;
 For, when our reputation is at stake,
 All must be sacrificed, conscience itself.
 But someone comes. 'Tis Theseus.

PHÆDRA.

And I see

Hippolytus, my ruin plainly written
 In his stern eyes. Do what you will ; I trust
 My fate to you. I cannot help myself.

Scene 4.

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTUS, PHÆDRA, CENONE,
 THERAMENES.

THESEUS.

Fortune no longer fights against my wishes,
 Madam, and to your arms restores—

PHÆDRA.

Stay, Theseus !

Do not profane endearments that were once
 So sweet, but which I am unworthy now
 To taste. You have been wrong'd. Fortune has proved

II.

E

Spiteful, nor in your absence spared your wife.
I am unfit to meet your fond caress,
How I may bear my shame my only care
Henceforth.

Scene 5.

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES.

THESEUS.

Strange welcome for your father, this !
What does it mean, my son ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Phædra alone
Can solve this mystery. But if my wish
Can move you, let me never see her more ;
Suffer Hippolytus to disappear
For ever from the home that holds your wife.

THESEUS.

You, my son ! Leave me ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

'Twas not I who sought her
'Twas you who led her footsteps to these shores.
At your departure you thought meet, my lord,
To trust Aricia and the Queen to this
Troæzian land, and I myself was charged
With their protection. But what cares henceforth
Need keep me here ? My youth of idleness
Has shown its skil enough o'er paltry foes
That range the woods. May I not quit a life
Of such inglorious ease, and dip my spear
In nobler blood ? Ere you had reach'd my age
More than one tyrant, monster more than one
Had felt the weight of your stout arm. Already,
Successful in attacking insolence,

You had removed all dangers that infested
Our coasts to east and west. The traveller fear'd
Outrage no longer. Hearing of your deeds,
Already Hercules relied on you,
And rested from his toils. While I, unknown
Son of so brave a sire, am far behind
• Even my mother's footsteps. Let my courage
Have scope to act, and if some monster yet
Has 'scaped you, let me lay the glorious spoils
Down at your feet; or let the memory
Of death faced nobly keep my name alive,
And prove to all the world I was your son.

THESEUS.

• Why, what is this? What terror has possess'd
My family to make them fly before me?
If I return to find myself so fear'd,
So little welcome, why did Heav'n release me
From prison? My sole friend, misled by passion,
Was bent on robbing of his wife the tyrant
Who ruled Epirus. With regret I lent
The lover aid, but Fate had made us blind,
Myself as well as him. The tyrant seized me
Defenceless and unarm'd. Pirithoüs
I saw with tears cast forth to be devour'd
By savage beasts that lapp'd the blood of men.
Myself in gloomy caverns he inclosed,
Deep in the bowels of the earth, and nigh
To Pluto's realms. Six months I lay ere Heav'n
Had pity, and I 'scaped the watchful eyes
That guarded me. Then did I purge the world
Of a foul foe, and he himself has fed
His monsters. But, when with expectant joy
To all that is most precious I draw near
Of what the gods have left me, when my soul
Looks for full satisfaction in a sight
So dear, my only welcome is a shudder,
Embrace rejected, and a hasty flight.
Inspiring, as I clearly do, such terror,
Would I were still a prisoner in Epirus!

Phædra complains that I have suffer'd outrage.
Who has betray'd me? Speak. Why was I not
Avenged? Has Greece, to whom mine arm so oft
Brought useful aid, shelter'd the criminal?
You make no answer. Is my son, mine own
Dear son, confederate with mine enemies?
I'll enter. This suspense is overwhelming.
I'll learn at once the culprit and the crime,
And Phædra must explain her troubled state.

Scene 6.

HIPPOLYTUS, THERAMENES.

HIPPOLYTUS.

What do these words portend, which seem'd to freeze
My very blood? Will Phædra, in her frenzy,
Accuse herself, and seal her own destruction?
What will the King say? Gods! What fatal poison
Has love spread over all his house! Myself,
Full of a fire his hatred disapproves,
How changed he finds me from the son he knew!
With dark forebodings is my mind alarm'd,
But innocence has surely naught to fear.
Come, let us go, and in some other place
Consider how I best may move my sire
To tenderness, and tell him of a flame
Vex'd but not vanquish'd by a father's blame.

ACT IV.

Scene 1.

THESEUS, CENONE.

THESEUS.

Ah! What is this I hear? Presumptuous traitor!
And would he have disgraced his father's honour?
With what relentless footsteps Fate pursues me!
Whither I go I know not, nor where now
I am. O kind affection ill repaid!
Audacious scheme! Abominable thought!
To reach the object of his foul desire
The wretch disdain'd not to use violence.
I know this sword that served him in his fury,
The sword I gave him for a nobler use.
Could not the sacred ties of blood restrain him?
And Phædra,—was she loath to have him punish'd?
She held her tongue. Was that to spare the culprit?

CENONE.

Nay, but to spare a most unhappy father.
O'erwhelm'd with shame that her eyes should have kindled
So infamous a flame and prompted him
To crime so heinous, Phædra would have died.
I saw her raise her arm, and ran to save her.
To me alone you owe it that she lives;
And, in my pity both for her and you,
Have I against my will interpreted
Her tears.

THESEUS.

The traitor! He might well turn pale.
'Twas fear that made him tremble when he saw me.
I was astonish'd that he show'd no pleasure;
His frigid greeting chill'd my tenderness.
But was this guilty passion that devours him

Declared already ere I banish'd him
From Athens?

CENONE.

Sire, remember how the Queen
Urged you. Illicit love caused all her hatred.

THESEUS.

And then this fire broke out again at Trœzen?

CENONE.

Sire, I have told you all. Too long the Queen
Has been allow'd to bear her grief alone.
Let me now leave you and attend to her.

Scene 2.

THESEUS, HIPPOLYTUS.

THESEUS.

Ah! There he is. Great gods! That noble mien
Might well deceive an eye less fond than mine!
Why should the sacred stamp of virtue gleam
Upon the forehead of an impious wretch?
Ought not the blackness of a traitor's heart
To show itself by sure and certain signs?

HIPPOLYTUS.

My father, may I ask what fatal cloud
Has troubled your majestic countenance?
Dare you not trust this secret to your son?

THESEUS.

Traitor, how dare you show yourself before me?
Monster, whom Heaven's bolts have spared too long!
Survivor of that robber crew whereof
I cleansed the earth. After your brutal lust
Scorn'd even to respect my marriage bed,

You venture—you, my hated foe—to come
Into my presence, here, where all is full
Of your foul infamy, instead of seeking
Some unknown land that never heard my name.
Fly, traitor, fly ! Stay not to tempt the wrath
That I can scarce restrain, nor brave my hatred.
Disgrace enough have I incurr'd for ever
In being father of so vile a son,
Without your death staining indelibly
The glorious record of my noble deeds.
Fly, and unless you wish quick punishment
To add you to the criminals cut off
By me, take heed this sun that lights us now
Ne'er see you more set foot upon this soil.
I tell you once again,—fly, haste, return not,
Kil all my realms of your atrocious presence.

To thee, to thee, great Neptune, I appeal ;
If erst I clear'd thy shores of foul assassins,
Recall thy promise to reward those efforts,
Crown'd with success, by granting my first pray'r.
Confined for long in close captivity,
I have not yet call'd on thy pow'rful aid,
Sparing to use the valued privilege
Till at mine utmost need. The time is come,
I ask thee now. Avenge a wretched father !
I leave this traitor to thy wrath ; in blood
Quench his outrageous fires, and by thy fury
Theseus will estimate thy favour tow'rds him.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Phædra accuses me of lawless passion !
This crowning horror all my soul confounds ;
Such unexpected blows, falling at once,
O'erwhelm me, choke my utterance, strike me dumb.

THESEUS.

Traitor, you reckon'd that in timid silence
Phædra would bury your brutality.
You should not have abandon'd in your flight
The sword that in her hands helps to condemn you

Or rather, to complete your perfidy,
You should have robb'd her both of speech and life.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Justly indignant at a lie so black
I might be pardon'd if I told the truth ;
But it concerns your honour to conceal it.
Approve the reverence that shuts my mouth ;
And, without wishing to increase your woes,
Examine closely what my life has been.
Great crimes are never single, they are link'd
To former faults. He who has once transgress'd
May violate at last all that men hold
Most sacred ; vice, like virtue, has degrees
Of progress ; innocence was never seen
To sink at once into the lowest depths
Of guilt. No virtuous man can in a day
Turn traitor, murderer, an incestuous wretch.
The nursling of a chaste, heroic mother,
I have not proved unworthy of my birth.
Pittheus, whose wisdom is by all esteem'd,
Deign'd to instruct me when I left her hands.
It is no wish of mine to vaunt my merits,
But, if I may lay claim to any virtue,
I think beyond all else I have display'd
Abhorrence of those sins with which I'm charged.
For this Hippolytus is known in Greece,
So continent that he is deem'd austere.
All know my abstinence inflexible :
The daylight is not purer than my heart.
How then could I, burning with fire profane—

THESEUS.

Yes, dastard, 'tis that very pride condemns you.
I see the odious reason of your coldness :
Phædra alone bewitch'd your shameless eyes ;
Your soul, to others' charms indifferent,
Disdain'd the blameless fires of lawful love.

HIPPOLYTUS.

No, father, I have hidden it too long,
This heart has not disdain'd a sacred flame.
Here at your feet I own my real offence :
I love, and love in truth where you forbid me ;
Bound to Aricia by my heart's devotion,
The child of Pallas has subdued your son.
A rebel to your laws, her I adore,
And breathe forth ardent sighs for her alone.

THESEUS

You love her ? Heav'ns !

But no, I see the trick.

You feign a crime to justify yourself.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Sir, I have shunn'd her for six months, and still
Love her. To you yourself I came to tell it,
Trembling the while. Can nothing clear your mind
Of your mistake ? What oath can reassure you ?
By heav'n and earth and all the pow'rs of nature —

THESEUS.

The wicked never shrink from perjury.
Cease, cease, and spare me irksome protestations,
If your false virtue has no other aid.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Tho' it to you seem false and insincere,
Phædra has secret cause to know it true.

THESEUS.

Ah ! how your shamelessness excites my wrath !

HIPPOLYTUS.

What is my term and place of banishment ?

THESEUS.

Were you beyond the Pillars of Alcides,
Your perjured presence were too near me yet.

HIPPOLYTUS.

What friends will pity me, when you forsake
And think me guilty of a crime so vile?

THESEUS.

Go, look you out for friends who hold in honour
Adultery and clap their hands at incest,
Low, lawless traitors, steep'd in infamy,
The fit protectors of a knave like you.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Are incest and adultery the words
You cast at me? I hold my tongue. Yet think
What mother Phædra had; too well you know
Her blood, not mine, is tainted with those horrors.

THESEUS.

What! Does your rage before my eyes lose all
Restraint? For the last time,—out of my sight!
Hence, traitor! Wait not till a father's wrath
Force thee away 'mid general execration.

*Scene 3.*THESEUS (*alone*).

Wretch! Thou must meet inevitable ruin.
Neptune has sworn by Styx—to gods themselves
A dreadful oath.—and he will execute
His promise. Thou canst not escape his vengeance.
I loved thee; and, in spite of thine offence,
My heart is troubled by anticipation
For thee. But thou hast earn'd thy doom too well.

Had father ever greater cause for rage?
Just gods, who see the grief that overwhelms me,
Why was I cursed with such a wicked son?

Scene 4.

PHÆDRA, THESEUS.

PHÆDRA.

My lord, I come to you, fill'd with just dread.
Your voice raised high in anger reach'd mine ears,
And much I fear that deeds have follow'd threats.
• Oh, if there yet is time, spare your own offspring,
Respect your race and blood, I do beseech you.
Let me not hear that blood cry from the ground;
Save me the horror and perpetual pain
Of having caused his father's hand to shed it.

THESEUS.

No, Madam, from that stain my hand is free
But, for all that, the wretch has not escaped me.
The hand of an Immortal now is charged
With his destruction. 'Tis a debt that Neptune
Owes me, and you shall be avenged.

PHÆDRA.

A debt

Owed you? Pray's made in anger—

THESEUS.

Never fear

That they will fail. Rather join yours to mine.
In all their blackness paint for me his crimes,
And fan my tardy passion to white heat.
But yet you know not all his infamy;
His rage against you overflows in slanders;
Your mouth, he says, is full of all deceit,
He says Aricia has his heart and soul,
That her alone he loves.

PHÆDRA.

Aricia?

THESEUS.

Ay,

He said it to my face: an idle pretext!
A trick that gulls me not! Let us hope Neptune
Will do him speedy justice. To his altars
I go, to urge performance of his oaths.

*Scene 5.*PHÆDRA (*alone*).

Ah, he is gone! What tidings struck mine ears?
What fire, half smother'd, in my heart revives?
What fatal stroke falls like a thunderbolt?
Stung by remorse that would not let me rest,
I tore myself out of Cénoue's arms,
And flew to help Hippolytus with all
My soul and strength. Who knows if that repentance
Might not have moved me to accuse myself?
And, if my voice had not been choked with shame,
Perhaps I had confess'd the frightful truth.
Hippolytus can feel, but not for me!
Aricia has his heart, his plighted troth.
Ye gods, when, deaf to all my sighs and tears,
He arm'd his eye with scorn, his brow with threats,
I deem'd his heart, impregnable to love,
Was fortified 'gainst all my sex alike.
And yet another has prevail'd to tame
His pride, another has secured his favour.
Perhaps he has a heart easily melted;
I am the only one he cannot bear!
And shall I charge myself with his defence?

Scene 6.

PHÆDRA, CENONE.

PHÆDRA.

Know you, dear Nurse, what I have learn'd just now ?

CENONE.

No ; bdt I come in truth with trembling limbs.
I dreaded with what purpose you went forth,
'The fear of fatal madness made me pale.

PHÆDRA.

Who would have thought it, Nurse ? I had a rival.

CENONE.

A rival ?

PHÆDRA.

Yes, he loves. I cannot doubt it.
This wild untamable Hippolytus,
Who scorn'd to be admired, whom lovers' sighs
Wearied, this tiger, whom I fear'd to rouse,
Fawns on a hand that has subdued his pride :
Aricia has found entrance to his heart.

CENONE.

Aricia ?

PHÆDRA.

Ah ! anguish as yet untried !
For what new tortures am I still reserv'd ?
All I have undergone, transports of passion,
Longings and fears, the horrors of remorse,
The shame of being spurn'd with contumely,
Were feeble foretastes of my present torments.
They love each other ! By what secret charm
Have they deceived me ? Where, and when, and how
Met they ? You knew it all. Why was I cozen'd ?

You never told me of those stolen hours
 Of amorous converse. Have they oft been seen
 Talking together? Did they seek the shades
 Of thickest woods? Alas! full freedom had they
 To see each other. Heav'n approved their sighs;
 They loved without the consciousness of guilt;
 And every morning's sun for them shone clear,
 While I, an outcast from the face of Nature,
 Shunn'd the bright day, and sought to hide myself.
 Death was the only god whose aid I dared
 To ask: I waited for the grave's release:
 Water'd with tears, nourish'd with gall, my woe
 Was all too closely watch'd; I did not dare
 To weep without restraint. In mortal dread
 Tasting this dangerous solace, I disguised
 My terror 'neath a tranquil countenance,
 And oft had I to check my tears, and smile.

CENONE.

What fruit will they enjoy of their vain love?
 They will not see each other more.

PHÆDRA.

That love
 Will last for ever. Even while I speak,
 Ah, fatal thought, they laugh to scorn the madness
 Of my distracted heart. In spite of exile
 That soon must part them, with a thousand oaths
 They seal yet closer union. Can I suffer
 A happiness, CEnone, which insults me?
 I crave your pity. She must be destroy'd.
 My husband's wrath against a hateful stock
 Shall be revived, nor must the punishment
 Be light: the sister's guilt passes the brothers'.
 I will entreat him in my jealous rage.

What am I saying? Have I lost my senses?
 Is Phædra jealous, and will she implore
 Theseus for help? My husband lives, and yet
 I burn. For whom? Whose heart is this I claim
 As mine? At every word I say, my hair

Stands up with horror. Guilt henceforth has pass'd
All bounds. Hypocrisy and incest breathe
At once thro' all. My murderous hands are ready
To spill the blood of guileless innocence.
Do I yet live, wretch that I am, and dare
To face this holy Sun from whom I spring?
• My father's sire was king of all the gods;
My ancestors fill all the universe.
Where can I hide? In the dark realms of Pluto?
But there my father holds the fatal urn;
His hand awards, th' irrevocable doom:
Minos is judge of all the ghosts in hell.
Ah! how his awful shade will start and shudder
When he shall see his daughter brought before him,
• Forced to confess sins of such varied dye,
Crimes it may be unknown to hell itself!
What wilt thou say, my father, at a sight
So dire? I think I see thee drop the urn.
And, seeking some unheard-of punishment,
Thyself become my executioner.
Spare me! A cruel goddess has destroy'd
Thy race; and in my madness recognize
Her wrath. Alas! My aching heart has reap'd
No fruit of pleasure from the frightful crime
The shame of which pursues me to the grave,
And ends in torment life-long misery.

ÆNONE.

Ah, Madam, pray dismiss a groundless dread:
Look less severely on a venial error.
You love. We cannot conquer destiny.
You were drawn on as by a fatal charm.
Is that a marvel without precedent
Among us? Has love triumph'd over you,
And o'er none else? Weakness is natural
To man. A mortal, to a mortal's lot
Submit. You chafe against a yoke that others
Have long since borne. The dwellers in Olympus,
The gods themselves, who terrify with threats
The sins of men, have burn'd with lawless fires.

PHÆDRA.

What words are these I hear? What counsel this
 You dare to give me? Will you to the end
 Pour poison in mine ears? You have destroy'd me.
 You brought me back when I should else have quitted
 The light of day, made me forget my duty
 And see Hippolytus, till then avoided.
 What hast thou done? Why did your wicked mouth
 With blackest lies slander his blameless life?
 Perhaps you've slain him, and the impious pray'r
 Of an unfeeling father has been answer'd.
 No, not another word! Go, hateful monster;
 Away, and leave me to my piteous fate.
 May Heav'n with justice pay you your deserts!
 And may your punishment for ever be
 A terror to all those who would, like you,
 Nourish with artful wiles the weaknesses
 Of princes, push them to the brink of ruin
 To which their heart inclines, and smooth the path
 Of guilt. Such flatterers doth the wrath of Heav'n
 Bestow on kings as its most fatal gift.

GENONE (*alone*).

O gods! to serve her what have I not done?
 This is the due reward that I have won.

ACT V.

Scene 1.

HIPPOLYTUS, ARICIA.

ARICIA.

Can you keep silent in this mortal peril?
 Your father loves you. Will you leave him thus
 Deceived? If in your cruel heart you scorn
 My tears, content to see me nevermore,

Go, part from poor Aricia; but at least,
Going, secure the safety of your life.
Defend your honour from a shameful stain.
And force your father to recall his pray'rs.
There yet is time. Why out of mere caprice
Leave the field free to Phædra's calumnies?
Let Theseus know the truth.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Could I say more,
Without exposing him to dire disgrace?
How should I venture, by revealing all,
To make a father's brow grow red with shame?
The odious mystery to you alone
Is known. My heart has been outpour'd to none
Save you and Heav'n. I could not hide from you
(Judge if I love you), all I fain would hide
E'en from myself. But think under what seal
I spoke. Forget my words, if that may be;
And never let so pure a mouth disclose
This dreadful secret. Let us trust to Heav'n
My vindication, for the gods are just;
For their own honour will they clear the guiltless;
Sooner or later punish'd for her crime,
Phædra will not escape the shame she merits.
I ask no other favour than your silence;
In all besides I give my wrath free scope.
Make your escape from this captivity,
Be bold to bear me company in flight;
Linger not here on this accursèd soil,
Where virtue breathes a pestilential air.
To cover your departure take advantage
Of this confusion, caused by my disgrace.
The means of flight are ready, be assured;
You have as yet no other guards than mine.
Pow'rful defenders will maintain our quarrel;
Argos spreads open arms, and Sparta calls us.
Let us appeal for justice to our friends,
Nor suffer Phædra, in a common ruin
Joining us both, to hunt us from the throne,
fi.

And aggrandise her son by robbing us.
 Embrace this happy opportunity:
 What fear restrains? You seem to hesitate.
 Your interest alone prompts me to urge
 Boldness, When I am all on fire, how comes it
 That you are ice? Fear you to follow then
 A banish'd man?

ARICIA.

Ah, dear to me would be
 Such exile! With what joy, my fate to yours
 United, could I live, by all the world
 Forgotten! But not yet has that sweet tie
 Bound us together. How then can I steal
 Away with you? I know the strictest honour
 Forbids me not out of your father's hands
 To free myself; this is no parent's home,
 And flight is lawful when one flies from tyrants.
 But you, Sir, love me; and my virtue shrinks--

HIPPOLYTUS.

No, no, your reputation is to me
 As dear as to yourself. A nobler purpose
 Brings me to you. Fly from your foes, and follow
 A husband. Heav'n, that sends us these misfortunes,
 Sets free from human instruments the pledge
 Between us. Torches do not always light
 The face of Hymen.

At the gates of Trœzen,
 'Mid ancient tombs where princes of my race
 Lie buried, stands a temple ne'er approach'd
 By perjurers, where mortals dare not make
 False oaths, for instant punishment befalls
 The guilty. Falsehood knows no stronger check
 Than what is present there—the fear of death
 That cannot be avoided. Thither then
 We'll go, if you consent, and swear to love
 For ever, take the guardian god to witness
 Our solemn vows, and his paternal care
 Entreat. I will invoke the name of all •
 The holiest Pow'rs; chaste Dian, and the Queen

Of Heav'n, yea all the gods who know my heart
Will guarantee my sacred promises.

ARICIA.

The King draws near. Depart,—make no delay.
To mask my flight, I linger yet one moment.
Go you ; and leave with me some trusty guide,
To lead my timid footsteps to your side.

Scene 2.

THESEUS, ARICIA, ISMENE.

THESEUS.

Ye gods, throw light upon my troubled mind,
Show me the truth which I am seeking here.

ARICIA (*aside to ISMENE*).

Get ready, dear Ismene, for our flight.

Scene 3.

THESEUS, ARICIA.

THESEUS.

Your colour comes and goes, you seem confused,
Madam ! What business had my son with you ?

ARICIA.

Sire, he was bidding me farewell for ever.

THESEUS.

Your eyes, it seems, can tame that stubborn pride ;
And the first sighs he breathes are paid to you.

ARICIA.

I can't deny the truth ; he has not, Sire,
Inherited your hatred and injustice ;
He did not treat me like a criminal.

THESEUS.

That is to say, he swore eternal love.
Do not rely on that inconstant heart ;
To others has he sworn as much before.

ARICIA.

He, Sire ?

THESEUS.

You ought to check his roving taste
How could you bear a partnership so vile ?

ARICIA.

And how can you endure that vilest slanders
Should make a life so pure as black as pitch ?
Have you so little knowledge of his heart ?
Do you so ill distinguish between guilt
And innocence ? What mist before your eyes
Blinds them to virtue so conspicuous ?
Ah ! 'tis too much to let false tongues defame him
Repent ; call back your murderous wishes, Sire ;
Fear, fear lest Heav'n in its severity
Hate you enough to hear and grant your pray'rs.
Oft in their wrath the gods accept our victims,
And oftentimes chastise us with their gifts.

THESEUS.

No, vainly would you cover up his guilt
Your love is blind to his depravity.
But I have witness irreproachable :
Tears have I seen, true tears, that may be trusted.

ARICIA.

Take heed, my lord. Your hands invincible
Have rid the world of monsters numberless ;

But all are not destroy'd, one you have left
Alive—Your son forbids me to say more.
Knowing with what respect he still regards you,
I should too much distress him if I dared
Complete my sentence. I will imitate
His reverence, and, to keep silence, leave you.

Scene 4.

THESEUS (*alone*).

What is there in her mind? What meaning lurks
In speech begun but to be broken short?
Would both deceive me with a vain pretence?
Have they conspired to put me to the torture?
And yet, despite my stern severity,
What plaintive voice cries deep within my heart?
A secret pity troubles and alarms me.
Cenone shall be questioned once again,
I must have clearer light upon this crime.
Guards, bid Cenone come, and come alone.

Scene 5.

THESEUS, PANOPE.

PANOPE.

I know not what the Queen intends to do,
But from her agitation dread the worst.
Fatal despair is painted on her features;
Death's pallor is already in her face.
Cenone, shamed and driven from her sight,
Has cast herself into the ocean depths.
None knows what prompted her to deed so rash;
And now the waves hide her from us for ever.

THESEUS.

What say you?

PANOPE.

Her sad fate seems to have added
Fresh trouble to the Queen's tempestuous soul.
Sometimes, to soothe her secret pain, she clasps
Her children close, and bathes them with her tears;
Then suddenly, the mother's love forgotten,
She thrusts them from her with a look of horror.
She wanders to and fro with doubtful steps;
Her vacant eye no longer knows us. Thrice
She wrote, and thrice did she, changing her mind, .
Destroy the letter ere 'twas well begun.
Vouchsafe to see her, Sire: vouchsafe to help her.

THESEUS.

Heav'ns! Is Ceneone dead, and Phædra bent
On dying too? Oh, call me back my son!
Let him defend himself, and I am ready
To hear him. Be not hasty to bestow
Thy fatal bounty, Neptune; let my pray'rs
Rather remain ever unheard. Too soon
I lifted cruel hands, believing lips
That may have lied! Ah! What despair may follow!

Scene 6.

THESEUS, THERAMENES.

THESEUS.

Theramenes, is 't thou? Where is my son?
I gave him to thy charge from tenderest childhood.
But whence these tears that overflow thine eyes?
How is it with my son?

THERAMENES.

Concern too late!
Affection vain! Hippolytus is dead.

THESEUS.

Gods!

THERAMENES.

I have seen the flow'r of all mankind
Cut off, and I am bold to say that none
Deserved it less.

THESEUS.

What! My son dead! When I
Was stretching out my arms to him, has Heav'n
Hasten'd his end? What was this sudden stroke?

THERAMENES.

Scarce had we pass'd out of the gates of Trœzen,
He silent in his chariot, and his guards,
Downcast and silent too, around him ranged;
To the Mycenian road he turn'd his steeds,
Then, lost in thought, allow'd the reins to lie
Loose on their backs. His noble chargers, erst
So full of ardour to obey his voice,
With head depress'd and melancholy eye
Seem'd now to mark his sadness and to share it.
A frightful cry, that issues from the deep,
With sudden discord rends the troubled air;
And from the bosom of the earth a groan
Is heard in answer to that voice of terror.
Our blood is frozen at our very hearts;
With bristling manes the list'ning steeds stand still.
Meanwhile upon the watery plain there rises
A mountain billow with a mighty crest
Of foam, that shoreward rolls, and, as it breaks,
Before our eyes vomits a furious monster.
With formidable horns its brow is arm'd,
And all its body clothed with yellow scales,
In front a savage bull, behind a dragon
Turning and twisting in impatient rage.
Its long continued bellowings make the shore
Tremble; the sky seems horror-struck to see it;
The earth with terror quakes; its poisonous breath
Infects the air. The wave that brought it ebbs
In fear. All fly, forgetful of the courage
That cannot aid, and in a neighbouring temple

Take refuge—all save bold Hippolytus.
A hero's worthy son, he stays his steeds,
Seizes his darts, and, rushing forward, hurls
A missile with sure aim that wounds the monster
Deep in the flank. With rage and pain it springs
E'en to the horses' feet, and, roaring, falls,
Writhes in the dust, and shows a fiery throat
That covers them with flames, and blood, and smoke.
Fear lends them wings; deaf to his voice for once,
And heedless of the curb, they onward fly.
Their master wastes his strength in efforts vain;
With foam and blood each courser's bit is red.
Some say a god, amid this wild disorder,
Is seen with goads pricking their dusty flanks.
O'er jagged rocks they rush urged on by terror;
Crash! goes the axle-tree. Th' intrepid youth
Sees his car broken up, flying to pieces;
He falls himself entangled in the reins.
Pardon my grief. That cruel spectacle
Will be for me a source of endless tears.
I saw thy hapless son, I saw him, Sire,
Dragg'd by the horses that his hands had fed,
Pow'rless to check their fierce career, his voice
But adding to their fright, his body soon
One mass of wounds. Our cries of anguish fill
The plain. At last they slacken their swift pace,
Then stop, not far from those old tombs that mark
Where lie the ashes of his royal sires.
Panting I thither run, and after me
His guard, along the track stain'd with fresh blood
That reddens all the rocks; caught in the briers
Locks of his hair hang dripping, gory spoils!
I come, I call him. Stretching forth his hand,
He opes his dying eyes, soon closed again.
"The gods have robb'd me of a guiltless life,"
I hear him say: "Take care of sad Aricia
When I am dead. Dear friend, if e'er my father
Mourn, undeceived, his son's unhappy fate
Falsely accused; to give my spirit peace,
Tell him to treat his captive tenderly,
And to restore—" With that the hero's breath

Fails, and a mangled corpse lies in my arms,
A piteous object, trophy of the wrath
Of Heav'n—so changed, his father would not know him.

THESEUS.

Alas, my son! Dear hope for ever lost!
The ruthless gods have served me but too well.
For what a life of anguish and remorse
Am I reserved!

THERAMENES.

Aricia at that instant,
Flying from you, comes timidly, to take him
For husband, there, in presence of the gods.
Thus drawing nigh, she sees the grass all red
And reeking, sees (sad sight for lover's eye!)
Hippolytus stretch'd there, pale and disfigured.
But, for a time doubtful of her misfortune,
Unrecognized the hero she adores,
She looks, and asks—"Where is Hippolytus?"
Only too sure at last that he lies there
Before her, with sad eyes that silently
Reproach the gods, she shudders, groans, and falls,
Swooning and all but lifeless, at his feet.
Ismene, all in tears, kneels down beside her,
And calls her back to life—life that is naught
But sense of pain. And I, to whom this light
Is darkness now, come to discharge the duty
The hero has imposed on me, to tell thee
His last request—a melancholy task.
But hither comes his mortal enemy.

Scene 7.

THESEUS, PHÆDRA, THERAMENES, PANOPE, GUARDS.

THESEUS.

Madam, you've triumph'd, and my son is kill'd!
Ah, but what room have I for fear! How justly
Suspicion racks me that in blaming him

I err'd! But he is dead; accept your victim
 Rightly or wrongly slain, let your heart leap
 For joy. My eyes shall be for ever blind:
 Since you accuse him, I'll believe him guilty.
 His death affords me cause enough for tears,
 Without a foolish search for further light
 Which, pow'rless to restore him to my grief,
 Might only serve to make me more unhappy.
 Far from this shore and far from you I'll fly,
 For here the image of my mangled son
 Would haunt my memory and drive me mad.
 From the whole world I fain would banish me,
 For all the world seems to rise up in judgment
 Against me; and my very glory weights
 My punishment; for, were my name less known,
 'Twere easier to hide me. All the favours
 The gods have granted me I mourn and hate,
 Nor will I importune them with vain pray'rs
 Henceforth for ever. Give me what they may,
 What they have taken will all else outweigh.

PHÆDRA.

Theseus, I cannot hear you and keep silence:
 I must repair the wrong that he has suffer'd—
 Your son was innocent.

THESEUS.

Unhappy father!
 And it was on your word that I condemn'd him!
 Think you such cruelty can be excused—

PHÆDRA.

Moments to me are precious; hear me, Theseus.
 'Twas I who cast an eye of lawless passion
 On chaste and dutiful Hippolytus.
 Heav'n in my bosom kindled baleful fire,
 And vile Enone's cunning did the rest.
 She fear'd Hippolytus, knowing my madness,
 Would make that passion known which he regarded
 With horror; so advantage of my weakness

She took, and naster'd to accuse him first.
For that she has been punish'd, tho' too mildly;
Seeking to s'un my wrath she cast herself
Beneath th' waves. The sword ere now had cut
My thread of life, but slander'd innocence
Made its cry heard, and I resolved to die
In a more lingering way, confessing first
My penitence to you. A poison, brought
To Athens by Medea, runs thro' my veins.
Already in my heart the venom works,
Infusing there a strange and fatal chill;
Already as thro' thickening mists I see
The spouse to whom my presence is an outrage;
Death, from mine eyes veiling the light of heav'n,
Restores its purity that they defiled.

PANOPE.

She dies, my lord!

THESEUS.

Would that the memory
Of her disgraceful deed could perish with her!
Ah, disabused too late! Come, let us go,
And with the blood of mine unhappy son
Mingle our tears, clasping his dear remains,
In deep repentance for a pray'r detested.
Let him be honour'd as he well deserves;
And, to appease his sore offended ghost,
Be fier near kinsmen's guilt whate'er it may,
Aricia shall be held my daughter from to-day.

ESTHER.

A TRAGEDY FOUNDED ON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER.

ESTHER—the first of Racine's two sacred dramas—is a tragedy in the Aristotelian acceptation of the term, as being concerned with a great and noble action, and calculated to excite generous pity and fear, though the denouement is a happy one for the heroine and her compatriots. It was composed by Racine when he was in his fiftieth year, and acted at the Maison de Saint Cyr in 1689 (see biographical notice, p. xv). The incidents are in strict accordance with the Biblical narrative, but our poet was obliged to invent the character of Elizabeth in order to furnish Esther with the confidante deemed so indispensable in the French drama of the period, while Hydaspes is made to perform a similar office for Haman. The fulsome prologue does not enhance our respect for the too courtly bard, who (speaking in the name of Piety!) extols bigotry, and singles out for special commendation the capital blunder which Louis XIV. had recently committed (1685) in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. He praises the Dauphin for virtues which were only too conspicuous in him by their absence. His flattery is indirectly extended to Madame de Maintenon in the opening lines of his play, the terms in which allusion is made to Vashti's disgrace being such as to recall the circumstances under which the former had supplanted Madame de Montespan in the king's favour; and the choral odes abound in delicate compliments to the distinguished patroness of the Maison de Saint Cyr.

Racine rejects the testimony of Herodotus to the purely monotheistic nature of the Persian religion. In this he has some ground of justification; but in representing the Persians as idolaters he is certainly wrong, and probably mistaken also in identifying Ahasuerus with Darius, son of Hystaspes. In "Esther" Racine for the first time introduces a Chorus, as in the ancient Greek drama, whose songs set to music by Moreau gratefully relieved the monotony of the somewhat stilted dialogue. The unity of place is, moreover, observed less rigidly than usual, a change of scene (though still within the limits of the royal palace) accompanying the rise of the curtain for each of the three Acts.

CHARACTERS.

AHASUERUS, *King of Persia.*

ESTHER, *Queen of Persia.*

MORDECAI, *Esther's Uncle.*

HAMAN, *Favourite of Ahasuerus.*

ZERESH, *Haman's Wife.*

HYDASPES, *Chamberlain of the Inner Palace.*

ASAPH, *another of the King's Officers.*

ELIZABETH, *Confidential Friend of Esther.*

TAMAR, *a Jewess, one of Esther's Attendants.*

Guards of King Ahasuerus.

Chorus of Young Jewish Maidens.

The scene is laid at Shushan, in the King's Palace

The Prologue is spoken by PIETY.

PROLOGUE.

PIETY.

From the Divine Creator's blest abode
I to this dwelling-place of Grace descend
Which Innocence, 'my constant comrade, haunts,
And finds no surer refuge 'neath the skies.
Here, far from tumult, by my hand is form'd
In holiest offices a rising race ;

I nourish in their hearts the fruitful seed
Of virtues that may sanctify the world.
A King, my guardian, a victorious King,
Has trusted to my care th's precious charge.
'Tis he has gather'd here these timid doves,
Else widely scatter'd, without help or guides :
Raising this palace at his gates for them,
He bids them find peace and abundance here.

Great God, forget not Thou this pious work !
Let all the care he for Thy glory takes
Be graven by Thy hand within the book
Where the predestined names of kings beloved
Of Heav'n are written ! Ever dost Thou hear me ;
Am I not Piety, Thy daughter dear,
Whose voice Thou knowest ? And this king's warms
I bear, and from the altar of Thy love
Kindle his heart. The fervent zeal that burns
His soul with a consuming fire for Thee
Is spread from east to west. Thou seest him
Daily before Thee bow his crown'd head
In worship, and, by his august example,
Confounding pride, adore Thy sacred threshold.
Of all earth's monarchs he alone maintains
Thy quarrel, and, inspired with holy ardour,
Fights for Thine honour. Jealousy and greed
Conspire against Thee, for foul heresy

Contending ; discord rages everywhere ;
All, as it seems, forsake Thy holy standards,
And hell, with dismal damps enshrouding all,
Has cast its darkness over saintliest eyes.
He only, grounded upon faith unchanging,
With ready eye and ear seeks naught but Thee,
And, vanquishing the fiend's vain subtlety,
Sustains the entire fabric of religion.
Judge Thine own cause, great God, make bare to-day
Thine arm, that self-same arm which fought for him,
When the Rhine saw so many times dispersed
The armies of the nations that had sworn
To crush him. Those same foes, in proud defiance,
Come to meet shipwreck on the rock before
Found fatal. Everywhere firm barriers burst,
Forth from their ruin'd forts they swarm across
His borders. Thou hast given him a son
Ready to fight, to aid, obey, command ;
A son whom, like himself, Conquest attends ;
His highest aim to gain his father's heart ;
A son whose love submits to all his wishes,
The terror and despair of all his foes ;
Worthy to rank with those heroic souls
Thy Justice sends. The King says, Go : he springs
Forward with joy, his vengeance falls like lightning,
And he returns calmly to lay the spoils
Down at his feet.

But while a mighty Monarch
Thus rights my wrongs, you who here taste delights
So pure, if he permits a moment's rest
To his brave heart, call to your blameless pastime
This hero ; Esther's glorious history
Enact, and impious wiles by faith subdued.

And ye for whom wild passions have a charm
Kindled by fictions frivolous and vain,
Who love profane and pagan spectacles,
Whose ears are not attuned to solemn words,
The sacred joys I bring are not for you ;
Fly, for all here breathes God, and peace, and truth.

ESTHER.

A TRAGEDY FOUNDED ON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

ACT I.

Scene—ESTHER'S chamber.

Scene 1.

ESTHER, ELIZABETH.

ESTHER.

Is 't thou, Elizabeth ? Thrice happy day !
Blessèd be Heav'n that to my pray'rs restores
The friend of earliest years, like me a daughter
Of Benjamin, who, gall'd by the same yoke
Of dire oppression, mourn'd with me the woes
Of captured Zion. Ah, how memory dwells
Still fondly on the visions of the past !
But thou, thine Esther's glory dost thou know ?
Six months and more has search for thee been made ;
What clime, what desert so remote could hide thee ?

ELIZABETH.

Stricken with grief at rumours of thy death,
I lived a life apart from all mankind,
And waited only for that life of sadness
To end, when suddenly a prophet spake :
" Too long hast thou bewail'd the loss of one
Who yet survives. Rise, take thy way to Shushan ;
There shalt thou see the object of thy tears

Seated in pomp and honour on a throne.
Zion," said he, "comfort thy timid tribes ;
The day draws nigh when the Lord God of hosts
Shall make the might of His strong arm appear,
For He has heard His people's cry for help."
He spake : and I, with joy and wonder moved,
Set off in haste, found entrance to this palace,
And see a spectacle that fills mine eyes
With admiration, worthy of the arm
'That saved our fathers ! Proud Ahasuerus
His captive crowns, and falls before the feet
Of a fair Jewess ! By what secret springs
Has Heav'n accomplish'd this unhop'd for triumph ?

ESTHER.

Thou may'st have heard the well-known story told
Of haughty Vashti's fall, whose place I fill ;
When Persia's king, inflamed with sore displeasure,
Banish'd the queen both from his throne and bed,
But could not drive her from his thoughts so soon ;
Long Vashti reign'd in his offended soul.
Then must there search be made thro' all his realms
For some new object that might wean him from her.
From Ind to Hellespont his slaves went forth ;
Daughters of Egypt show'd themselves at Shushan ;
E'en the wild Scythian and the Parthian sent
Their maidens to contend for beauty's prize,
'The sceptre. I was being then brought up
In secret under the wise, watchful eyes
Of Mordecai, to whom I owe so much.
When by the stroke of death I lost my parents,
To me, his brother's offspring, he supplied
The place of father, and of mother too.
The Jews were then sore vex'd night and day ;
He drew me out of my obscurity,
And, their deliverance to my feeble hands
Confiding, he possess'd me with the hope
Of empire. Trembling I obey'd his will :
Hither I came, but hid my race and country.
Who could recount the jealousies and plots

Hatch'd by the multitude of rivals here
Who all, disputing for so high a favour,
Waited their sentence at the monarch's eyes?
Each had supporters, each a pow'rful faction;
One boasted the advantages of birth;
Another borrow'd help from skilful hands
To deck herself in robes magnificent;
But I placed all my trust in Heav'n's support,
My only art the sacrifice of tears.

At last to me the summons of the King
Came; and before his presence I appear'd.
God holds the hearts of monarchs in His hands;
He brings prosperity to guileless souls,
While in their schemes of pride the wicked fall
Entrapp'd. My feeble charms appear'd to move
The King: in thoughtful silence long he gazed;
And Heav'n, that turn'd the balance in my favour,
Work'd doubtless on his heart the while. At length,
With eyes wherein a look of kindness reign'd,
"Be thou my Queen," he said, and therewithal
With his own hand upon my brow he placed
His diadem. Then he, to show his joy,
Loaded the great ones of his court with gifts;
And throughout all his realms his bounty bade
His subjects to the royal marriage feast.

During those days of jocund mirth, alas,
What secret shame and grief within me burn'd!
Esther, said I, Esther is clad in robes
Of state, and half the world obeys her sceptre,
While the grass grows over the walls of Salem;
Zion, the haunt of unclean reptiles, sees
Her holy temple scatter'd heaps of stones,
And ceased the festivals of Israel's God!

ELIZABETH.

Hast thou not told thy sorrow to the King?

ESTHER.

Until this day he knows not who I am:
He by whom under Heav'n my fate is ruled
Forbids me yet this secret to reveal.

ELIZABETH.

Is Mordecai allow'd an entrance here?

ESTHER.

His love for me sharpens his wit ; tho' absent
I ask his counsel, and his wise replies
Find countless ways and means to reach mine ears ;
No father for the welfare of his child
Has more concern. Already warn'd in secret
By him, I to the king made known a plot
Form'd by two household slaves against his life.
Meanwhile my warm attachment to our tribe
Has fill'd this palace with young maids of Zion,
Fair, tender flowers beaten by the storms
Of life, transplanted to an alien clime
With me. Apart from witnesses profane,
I make their training my chief care and study,
And, hither flying from the flattering court,
Sick of vain pomp, retired within myself,
I come to kneel before Jehovah's feet,
And taste the bliss of self-forgetfulness.
But from the Persians I conceal their race.
Now must I call them. Come, my children, come,
Erst my companions in captivity,
The patriarch Jacob's young posterity.

Scene 2.

ESTHER, ELIZABETH, CHORUS.

A JEWISH MAIDEN (*singing behind the stage*).

Sister, whose invitation greets our ear?

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

Those pleasing accents well I know :
It is the Queen.

BOTH MAIDENS.

My sisters, let us go.
It is the Queen we hear,
She calls us; let us hasten and draw near.

ALL THE CHORUS (*entering from different directions*).

It is the Queen we hear,
She calls us: let us hasten and draw near.

ELIZABETH.

What an array of innocence and beauty
Before mine eyes gather from every side!
What modesty and grace each countenance
Adorn! All hail, hope of a holy stock!
May your pure aspirations mount to Heav'n
Like the sweet smoke of incense! May our God
Regard you with a look of loving kindness!

ESTHER.

My children, sing one of those sacred songs
Wherewith so oft, mingling your tears with mine,
Ye have lamented Zion's misery.

A JEWISH MAIDEN (*alone*).

Where is the light that over Salem shone,
The glory that the world admired of yore?
Thou art but dust, that splendour nothing more
Than a sad memory of brightness gone.
Zion, exalted once to heaven's height,
But now brought down to the abyss of hell,
May dumbness my ingratitude requite,
If in my songs I e'er forget to tell,
Till my last breath, what sorrows thee befell?

ALL THE CHORUS.

Ye banks of Jordan! Plains beloved of Heav'n!
Each fertile valley and each holy hill,
To which God's countless wonders fame have giv'n!
From our dear fatherland sad exiles still,
This time of trouble shall we ne'er fulfil?

A JEWISH MAIDEN (*alone*).

When, Zion, shall I see thy ramparts raised,
Thy lofty tow'rs rebuilt in all their pride?
By festal throngs pressing from every side
When shall I hear the God of Israel praised?

ALL THE CHORUS.

Ye banks of Jordan! Plains beloved of Heav'n!
Each fertile valley and each holy hill,
To which God's countless wonders fame have giv'n!
From our dear fatherland sad exiles still,
This time of trouble shall we ne'er fulfil?

Scene 3.

ESTHER, MORDECAI, ELIZABETH, THE CHORUS.

ESTHER.

Who dares these sacred precincts to invade?
Is 't thou, my father? See I Mordecai?
Has then an angel of the Lord outspread
His holy wing to hide thee while he guided
Thy footsteps hither? But whence comes that air
Of gloom, that robe of sackcloth, and those ashes
Cast on thine head? What news?

MORDECAI.

Unhappy Queen!
O guiltless people, to a barbarous fate
Condemn'd! Read—read the hateful, cruel sentence—
We all are lost! and Israel's race is run!

ESTHER.

Just Heav'n! My blood is frozen in my veins.

MORDECAI.

The name of Jew is to be blotted out.
To bloody Haman are we all betray'd;

The swords, the knives already are prepared,
And the whole nation meets one common doom.
Haman, vile Haman, the Amalekite,
Arms all his influence for this fatal blow,
The King believes him, and has sign'd this edict.
Biass'd against us by those lying lips,
He thinks that Nature's very self abhors us.
His orders have been giv'n ; in all his States
The fatal day is fix'd for our destruction.
Heav'ns, will ye look on this atrocious slaughter ?
The sword will pity neither sex nor age ;
All will be prey for tigers and for vultures.
In ten days hence this dreadful day arrives.

ESTHER.

O God, to Whom these deadly plots are known,
Wilt Thou forsake the remnant of thy people ?

ONE OF THE YOUNGEST OF THE JEWISH MAIDENS.

Who will defend us, if Thou fight not for us ?

MORDECAI.

Leave tears, my Esther, to these tender babes.
The only hope of thine unhappy kinsmen
Rests upon thee. Help them ; but time is precious,
It flies, and soon will bring the destined day
For Israel's name to be wiped out for ever.
Fired with the ardour of God's holy prophets,
Go, boldly tell thy lineage to the King.

ESTHER

Alas ! Dost thou not know what laws severe
Guard the King's privacy from all intruders ?
In the seclusion of the inner palace
None may behold his awful majesty ;
'Tis death, without his summons, to presume
To show oneself before the royal presence.
Unless the King that instant should extend
His sceptre to be kiss'd, as sign of pardon.

'This fatal law affects all ranks alike,
In either sex the crime is still the same.
Entitled as I am to share his throne,
Herein I am a subject like another ;
And I must wait, if I would speak with him,
Until he seeks me, or else bids me come.

MORDECAI.

What ! When thou see'st thy country perishing,
Dost thou set store, my daughter, by thy life ?
God speaks, and dost thou fear a mortal's wrath ?
Nay, Esther. Canst thou count thy life thine own ?
Belongs it not to those from whom thy blood
Derived its source ? Belongs it not to God
Who gave it ? When He led thee to the throne,
Who knows if it was not to save His people ?
Ponder it well : God has not chosen thee
To win vain admiration from the gaze
Of heathen eyes, to charm the tribes of Asia :
For nobler ends doth He reserve His saints.
Self-sacrifice for Him and for His flock
Is the true portion of a child of God.
To risk thy life for His name's sake is bliss
Supreme. Not that His arm needs our support ;
Earth's mightiest kings cannot withstand His pow'r,
'T were vain for them to league themselves against Him ;
If He but show Himself their strength dissolves ;
He speaks and they return to dust. The sea
Retreats before His voice, the heavens tremble ;
He looks upon the universe as nothing ;
And feeble mortals, playthings of an hour,
Are all as though they were not in His sight.
If He has suffer'd Haman's wickedness,
'Tis only, be assured, to prove thy zeal.
'Tis He who, stirring me to this bold step,
Dear Esther, has vouchsafed to march before me :
And if His voice must strike thine ear in vain,
We shall behold His wonders none the less.
He can confound this Haman, He can burst
Our chains asunder by the weakest hand

The world contains. But, should'st thou spurn His grace,
It may be thou wilt perish with thy race. •

ESTHER.

Go, and let all the Jews that dwell at Shushan,
In earnest supplication night and day,
Unite with thee to lend me all the help
That prayer affords, and keep a three days' fast
Severe. Already has dark night descended :
To-morrow when the sun shall bring back day,
Content to meet my death if die I must,
I will go forth, and for my country offer
Myself. Let all retire.
(*The Chorus withdraws to the back of the stage.*)

Scene 4.

ESTHER, ELIZABETH, THE CHORUS.

ESTHER.

O God my King,
Behold me trembling and alone before Thee !
How oft my father in my childhood taught me
That Thou didst swear a covenant with us
When, to prepare a people for Thyself,
It pleased Thee in Thy love to choose our fathers :
Yea,*Thine own holy mouth did promise them
Posterity that should endure for ever.
Alas ! This people has despised Thy law ;
The nation of Thy choice has been unfaithful ;
She has cast off her Husband and her Father,
To pay adulterous vows to other gods ;
And now she stoops beneath the stranger's yoke.
But to be slaves is not enough, our lives
Are threaten'd ; our proud conquerors mock our tears,
To their own gods ascribe their victories,
And with one mortal blow would fain to-day
Destroy Thy name, Thy people, and Thy worship.
Shall then a traitor, after all Thy deeds

Of wondrous might, make void Thy covenant,
Rob all mankind of Thy most precious gift,
The Holy One, long promised, long expected ?
No, no, forbid the Gentiles in their fury,
Drunk with our blood, to shut the only mouths
Which hymn Thy praises throughout all the world ;
Confound their gods that are no gods at all.

And as for me whom Thou hast placed among
These infidels, Thou knowest how I hate
Their sinful feasts, and count as profanations
Their table, and their offerings, and rites ;
This very pomp to which I am condemn'd,
This diadem, that I am forced to wear
On days of high solemnity and pride,
I trample under foot when all alone,
To these vain gauds preferring dust and ashes,
And take no pleasure but in tears like these.
I have been waiting Thine appointed time
To venture boldly in Thy people's cause.
The hour is come ; and I, with prompt submission,
Will brave the dreadful presence of the King.
'Tis in Thy name I go ; guide Thou my steps
Before this lion fierce that knows Thee not ;
Command his wrath to sleep at sight of me,
And lend me gracious words to charm his ear.
The winds and tempests of the skies obey Thee ;
Turn Thou his rage against our enemies.

Scene 5.

THE CHORUS.

(All this scene is sung.)

A JEWISH MAIDEN (*alone*).

Faithful companions, to our tears and sighs
Let us give vent, nor cease to sob and moan ;
While tow'rd those holy hills we raise our eyes
Whence innocence can look for help alone.
What terrors round us rise !

Weep, Israel, weep thy total overthrow,
Ne'er was there known so just a cause for woe
As ours beneath the skies.

ALL THE CHORUS.

What terrors round us rise !

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

Was 't not enough the hateful conqueror's hand
Should have destroy'd majestic Zion's charms,
And led her children captive from their land ?

ALL THE CHORUS.

O terrible alarms !

THE SAME MAIDEN.

Like feeble sheep 'mid ravening wolves we stand,
Our sighs to Heaven are our only arms.

ALL THE CHORUS.

O terrible alarms !

ONE MAIDEN.

Let me cast off these ornaments, and tear
The veil that decks my head.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

Sackcloth and ashes let us rather wear,
Meet for the banquet dread
By impious Haman spread.

ALL THE CHORUS.

Let us cast off these ornaments, and tear
The veil that decks each head.

ONE MAIDEN.

On every side terror and bloodshed reign,
The aged and the young alike are slain,

The sister and the brother,
 The daughter with the mother,
The dying father clasps his son in vain !
What scatter'd heaps of mangled corpses lie
 Unburied on the ground !
 While leopards prowl around,
And make Thy saints their food, great God on high !

ONE OF THE YOUNGEST MAIDENS.

 Alas ! What have I done ?
Can one so young deserve a fate so dire ?
 Scarce has the promise of my life begun
To open, ere it falls, doom'd to expire
 Like blossom that ne'er sees a second sun
 Alas ! What have I done ?
Can one so young deserve a fate so dire ?

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

Unhappy victims we of others' crimes,
 What boots it our sad fortune to deplore ?
 Our fathers sinn'd, our fathers are no more ;
We bear the vengeance due to earlier times.

ALL THE CHORUS.

The Lord of hosts Whom we adore
 Will ne'er let righteous blood be spilt,
 Confounding innocence with guilt.

ONE MAIDEN.

 Let not the heathen say
Where then is Israel's God ? Let Him display
 His boasted pow'r to-day !

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

This jealous God, this God of matchless might,
 (Quake, nations of the world !)
This jealous God, this God of matchless might
Alone commands the depth, commands the height,
 By Him heav'n's bolts are hurl'd ;
No other god can make the darkness bright.

ANOTHER.

He overthrows the mighty in their pride ;

ANOTHER.

Places the meek and humble at His side.

ALL THE CHORUS.

The Lord of Hosts Whom we adore
Will ne'er let righteous blood be spilt,
Confounding innocence and guilt.

TWO MAIDENS.

O God, Whom glory hovers o'er,
Who art in robes of light array'd,
Who ridest where wild tempests roar,
On cherub's wings as on Thy throne convey'd :

TWO OTHER OF THE YOUNGEST MAIDENS.

Thou Who art pleased that simple babes should raise
With angel hosts their voices in Thy praise :

ALL THE CHORUS.

See Thou what perils round us rise :
Give honour to Thy name, we pray,
Nor let Thy glory pass away
To foreign gods whom we despise.

ONE MAIDEN.

Arm Thyself, Lord, Thy people to defend ;
And, as the sea saw Thee of old, descend,
That wicked men may be inclined
To fear Thy wrath.
Let them be, like the dust before the wind,
Swept from Thy path !

ALL THE CHORUS.

See Thou what perils round us rise :
Give honour to Thy name, we pray,
Nor let Thy glory pass away
To foreign gods whom we despise.

ACT II.

Scene—The throne room of Ahasuerus.

Scene 1.

HAMAN, HYDASPES.

HAMAN.

What! When the light of day scarce 'gins to dawn,
Dost thou dare bring me to this hall of terrors?

HYDASPES.

Thou knowest that my faithfulness is trusted;
These doors are shut and open'd at my bidding,
Mine only. Come. Elsewhere we may be heard.

HAMAN.

What is this secret then that thou would'st tell me?

HYDASPES.

Honour'd, my lord, by thee with countless favours,
I ever bear in mind that I have sworn
To show thee without falsehood or disguise
Whatever mysteries this palace holds.
A melancholy cloud inwraps the King:
This very night a frightful dream disturb'd him.
While all around was hush'd in peaceful silence,
His voice was heard in cries of agony.
I ran, and found him with disorder'd speech
Complaining of a peril nigh at hand,
A secret foe, a daring ravisher;
Ay, and the name of Esther pass'd his lips.
In horrors such as these he spent the night.
But tired at last of trying to recall
A vanish'd dream, its phantoms to dispel,
He bade those annals to be brought, wherein
The records of his reign, with care collected,

Are written out each day by faithful hands ;
Each service render'd, each offence is there
Inscribed for gratitude or punishment.
I left the King reclining on his couch
More calm, and listening with attentive ear.

HAMAN.

What portion of his life did he select ?

HYDASPES.

He is reviewing all those glorious times
Since, by the choice of fate, Ahasuerus
Was call'd to sit upon the throne of Cyrus.

HAMAN.

Has then this dream escaped his memory ?

HYDASPES.

From all Chaldæa's most renown'd diviners
Those have been gather'd who can best interpret
Dark messages from Heav'n in doubtful dreams—
But why these signs of sudden agitation ?
What have I said to cause thee such dismay ?
Has happy Haman then some secret care ?

HAMAN.

How canst thou ask, knowing how I am placed ?
Fear'd, hated, envied, oftentimes more wretched
Than any victim of my utmost vengeance !

HYDASPES.

On whom has Heaven ever look'd more kindly ?
Thou seest the whole world prostrate before thee.

HAMAN.

Not all the world ! Each day there is a man,
A worthless slave, who dares defy and scorn me.

HYDASPES.

Who is this enemy of King and country ?

HAMAN.

Say, dost thou know the name of Mordecai ?

HYDASPES.

What ? That vile leader of an impious race ?

HAMAN.

Ay, he forsooth.

HYDASPES.

And can so weak a foe
Disturb the peace of one so far above him ?

HAMAN.

The saucy fellow ne'er bows down before me.
In vain on bended knees all own the marks
Of favour that the mightiest of kings
Awards me. When no Persian dares to lift
His forehead bent to earth in sacred homage,
He, proudly seated, never moves his head,
Brands due obeisance as impiety,
Confronts me with seditious looks nor deigns
So much at least as to cast down his eyes !
Moreover, he besets the palace gate :
Whatever be the hour I leave or enter,
His hateful countenance offends and haunts me.
Ay, in my restless sleep I see him still.
This morning, though I had forestall'd the dawn,
I found him cover'd o'er with dust and ashes,
His raiment rent, cheek pale ; but in his eye-
Gleam'd the same proud defiance as before.
My friend, whence comes this daring insolence ?
Thou knowest all that passes in the palace ;
Tell me, is any voice here raised for him ?
What is the broken reed on which he leans ?

•
HYDASPES.

My lord, you know his timely information
Exposed the murderous plot that Teresh plann'd.
The grateful King then promised to reward him,
But since that time seems to have thought of it
•No more.

HAMAN.

With thee I will throw off disguise.
I have improved th' injustice of my lot : •
Brought as a slave to Persia when a child,
I rule the empire now where I was sold ;
My riches yield not to the wealth of kings,
•Children surround me to maintain my pow'r.
I only lack the royal diadem.
And yet (how blind are mortals to their boons !)
The passing sweetness of this heap of honours
Makes but a light impression on my heart ;
This Jew who sits before the palace gates
Plunges a thousand daggers in my breast,
And all my grandeur is to me insipid
So long as shines the sun upon this wretch.

HYDASPES.

Ten days, and he will vex thy sight no more :
He and his race are promised to the vultures.

HAMAN.

Ah, but the time is long to my impatience !
'Tis he, I will not hide from thee my vengeance,
'Tis he who, scorning to bow down before me,
Has brought them all under my arm to blast them.
A single victim is for me too little ; •
Revenge, if feebly wreak'd, tempts fresh transgression.
A man like Haman, when his wrath is roused,
In his just fury cannot leap too far.
There must be chastisement at which the world
Will tremble when it weighs the punishment
With the offence. Be a whole nation drown'd
In blood, and be it said in times to come :—

•

" There was a shameless people once, the Jews,
Spread over all the earth, its face they cover'd;
One of them dared to draw upon himself
The wrath of Haman,—and his nation perish'd.

HYDASPES.

It is not then the blood of Amalek.
That secretly incites thee to destroy them ?

HAMAN.

Sprung as I am from that unhappy stock,
Eternal hatred I might well have felt
For those who slaughter'd the Amalekites;
E'en to their flocks and herds no living thing
Was spared, and hardly did a wretched remnant
Escape the sword. But mine own exaltation
Engrosses every faculty I have,
And little room is left for claims of blood.
I need no further motive than th' offence
Of Mordecai. Against them then I stirr'd
The King, inventing falsehoods, barbing slanders,
Alarm'd him for his honour, for his life.
I show'd them rich and pow'rful, and seditious;
Their God Himself the foe of other gods.
" How long shall such a people be allow'd
To breathe, and with their impious worship taint
Thy realms ? A foreign race, to Persia's laws
Opposed, they live a life apart from all,
They study only to disturb our peace.
Hated by all men, all mankind they hate.
Crush them before their insolence has reach'd
Its ripeness ; fill thy coffers with their spoils."
I spake and was believed. The King's own seal
Of pow'r supreme was straightway to my hand
Committed. " Go," said he, " secure my peace,
Destroy those wretches ; take the spoil thyself."
Thus the whole nation was condemn'd at once :
I with the King settled the day of slaughter.
But my heart thirsts after this caittiff's blood,
And that his death should be delay'd is torture.

A secret trouble poisons all my joy.
Why must I see the Jew for ten days more ?

HYDASPES.

And canst thou not destroy him with a word ?
Speak, and the King will leave him in thy hands.

HAMAN.

I watch to seize a favourable moment.
Both thou and I know how the royal will
Is stubborn, and how oft in sudden transports
It breaks the springs of all our strategy.
But I torment me with fantastic fears :
What is the life of Mordecai to him !

HYDASPES.

Why linger, then ? Hence ! quickly give command
To raise the shameful instrument of death.

HAMAN.

I hear a sound. I go. Should the King call me,
Do thou—

HYDASPES.

Enough.

Scene 2.

AHASUERUS, HYDASPES, ASAPH, ROYAL ATTENDANTS.

AHASUERUS.

So then, without this warning,
Two traitors would have slain me in my bed ?
Let Asaph stay, and all the rest withdraw.

Scene 3.

AHASUERUS, ASAPH.

AHASUERUS (*seated on his throne*).

I must confess I almost had forgotten
The murderous scheme plann'd by this pair of traitors ;
And I have twice grown pale at a recital
That leaves its stamp of terror on my heart.
I see how punishment on guilt attended,
So that the miscreants breathed their last in torments.
But he, my zealous subject, whose keen eye
Traced the dark thread of their nefarious plot,
Who show'd me hands already raised to strike,
And by whose means Persia was saved with me,—
Has he been honour'd, or received reward
For faithful service?

ASAPH.

He was promised much :

I know no more.

AHASUERUS.

O culpable neglect !

Inevitable consequence of cares
Pressing upon a Prince like boisterous waves,
In quick succession to new objects ever
Drawing his thoughts. The past is swallow'd up
Like lightning's flash. What with the clamorous present,
Fears for the future, every hour a crowd
Of eager suitors vaunting their deserts
With selfish aims, he finds no faithful friend
To guard his Prince's honour from reproach,
Or to remind him of forgotten merit ;
While all are eager to point out fit objects
For punishment. Ah, rather let a wrong
'Scape vengeance, than a benefit so rare
Go unrewarded ! For he risk'd his life
To save his King. This man of matchless zeal,
Say, lives he yet ?

ASAPH.

His eyes behold this sun.

AHASUERUS.

Then why has he not sooner claim'd his meed?
What distant land hides him from wealth and honours?

ASAPH.

His usual seat is at thy palace gates;
There without blaming destiny or thee,
He drags along a life of misery.

AHASUERUS.

So much the less should I forget the virtue
Forgetful of itself. Tell me his name
Once more.

ASAPH.

The name I read was Mordecai.

AHASUERUS.

What countryman?

ASAPH.

Since I must tell the truth,
One of those captives who are doom'd to die,
Brought from the banks of Jordan to Euphrates.

AHASUERUS.

A Jew, then? Gracious Heaven, when my life
Was threaten'd by mine own ungrateful subjects,
The kindness of a Jew baffled their efforts!
A Jew preserved me from the sword of Persians?
But, since he saved me, be he what he may,
It matters not. Ho, some one!

Scene 4.

AHASUERUS, HYDASPES, ASAPH.

HYDASPES.

Sire?

AHASUERUS.

Go, see

If any of my nobles wait without.

HYDASPES.

Haman came hither ere the dawn of day.

AHASUERUS.

Well, let him enter. He may throw some light
On this affair.

Scene 5.

AHASUERUS, HAMAN, HYDASPES, ASAPH.

AHASUERUS.

Prop of my throne, approach,
Soul of my counsels, who hast oft relieved
My hand exhausted with the sceptre's weight.
I feel the secret stings of self-reproach.
I know thy zeal devoted and sincere,
Thy tongue a stranger to deceitful words,
Thy constant aim my interest alone.
Then tell me what a generous Prince should do,
To heap the highest honours on a subject
Whom he esteems? How can I recompense
Fidelity and virtue as becomes
A mighty monarch? To my gratitude
Impose no bounds, remember the vast power
I wield.

HAMAN (*aside*).

'Tis for thyself that thou art call'd
To speak. Who else so worthy of reward?

AHASUERUS.

What thinkest thou?

HAMAN.

I in my thoughts review
The use and custom of the kings of Persia;
But I recall them all in vain. For what
Are they, to rule thy conduct? Thine should rather
Serve as a model to thy late descendants.
If thou would'st recognise a subject's zeal,
Bethink thee honour only has a charm
For generous souls; and my advice, O King,
Is that this happy mortal be array'd
In royal purple, wearing on his brow
The sacred diadem, and let him ride
One of thy steeds, in pompous trappings deck'd,
Before all eyes in Shushan, and, to crown
His glory, let the noblest man at court,
The next to thee in riches and in pow'r,
Hold his proud courser's bridle, as he walks
Magnificently clad, and cry aloud
In all the public places: "Mortals, bow
With reverence due, 'tis thus the king delighteth
To honour merit in a faithful subject."

AHASUERUS.

I recognise the wisdom that inspires
Thy words, with mine own wishes in agreement.
Go, lose no time: let all that thou hast said
Be put in execution to the letter.
Virtue shall not be buried in oblivion.
'Tis Mordecai that I delight to honour,
The Jew that sitteth at the palace gates;
Order his triumph thou, and walk before him;
Let Shushan's streets re-echo with his name,

And all men, when they see him, bow the knee.
I would be now alone.

HAMAN (*aside*)

Gods!

Scene 6.

AHASUERUS.

Beyond doubt
'Tis honour quite unheard of, such as subject
Never enjoy'd before; but all the greater
This Jew's reward, the more detestable
His race; thereby I make my life more safe,
By showing how I fear to be ungrateful,
And how I can distinguish between guilt
And innocence. For none the less will I
Destroy this rebel crew, whose crimes—

Scene 7.

AHASUERUS, ESTHER, ELIZABETH, TAMAR, SOME OF THE
CHORUS.

(ESTHER enters leaning on ELIZABETH; four JEWISH
MAIDENS bear her train.)

AHASUERUS.

Who enters
Unbidden? Who thus insolently courts
Destruction? Guards—
What! Esther, is it thou?
I call'd thee not.

ESTHER.

My daughters, I'm undone!
Support your dying queen. (*She falls in a swoon.*)

AHASUERUS.

Pow'rs of Heaven !

What deadly paleness suddenly o'erspreads
Her lovely face ! What dost thou fear, my sister ?
So harsh a law was never made for thee.
Live : I hold out to thee the golden sceptre,
Sure pledge and token of my clemency.

ESTHER.

Whose welcome voice is this that bids me live,
And calls my fluttering soul back to my breast ?

AHASUERUS.

Dost thou not know thy husband's voice, my Esther ?
Come to thyself ! Once more I bid thee live !

ESTHER.

The majesty that's stamp'd upon thy brow
Has ever fill'd thy servant's eyes with fear.
Consider how that brow, with awful frown
Bent upon me, could not but terrify
My troubled soul. I seem'd to see thee ready
To crush me into dust, as from thy throne
Loud thunders peal'd. What heart was e'er so bold
That would not shudder as the lightning flash'd
From my lord's eyes ? Thus does the wrath of Heav'n —

AHASUERUS.

O sun ! Immortal torch of heav'nly light !
Mine own heart feels the shock that made hers cease
Its office, and I tremble at the sight
Of her distress. Calm, calm this agitation,
Esther, my queen, sole mistress of the heart
Of Persia's monarch ! Only prove the love
With which it burns. Say, shall I give thee half
Of all my realms ?

ESTHER.

Ah, can it be that thou,
Dreaded throughout the world, before whose throne

All kneel and kiss the dust, canst cast a look
So gracious on thy slave, and deign to offer
That heart as hers?

AHASUERUS.

Believe me, dearest Esther,
This sceptre, and the homage fear inspires
Have little charm for me; the pomp of pow'r
Is oft a burden to its sad possessor.
In thee, thee only, do I find a grace
That never palls nor loses its attraction.
How sweet the charm of loveliness and virtue!
In Esther breaths the very soul of peace
And innocence. Dark shadows flee before her,
She pours bright sunshine into days of gloom.
With thee beside me seated on this throne,
I fear no more the wrath of adverse stars;
My diadem, fair Esther, seems to borrow
A lustre from thy brow that gods themselves
Might envy. Answer boldly then, nor hide
What urgent purpose leads thy footsteps hither.
What anxious cares perplex thy troubled breast?
Thine eyes are raised to Heaven as I speak.
Tell me thy wish; it shall be gratified,
If its success depends on human hand.

ESTHER.

O kindness reassuring to the heart
It honours! No light matter prompts my pray'r.
Lo, misery or happiness awaits me;
Which it shall be hangs trembling on thy will.
One word from thee, ending my sore suspense,
Can render Esther happiest of queens.

AHASUERUS.

Why torture me with curiosity?

ESTHER.

If Esther has found favour in thy sight,
If e'er thou wast disposed to grant her wishes,

Vouchsafe thy presence at her board to-day,
Let Esther entertain her sovereign lord,
And Haman be admitted to the banquet.
Then, in his hearing, I will dare to utter
What in his absence I must still conceal.

AHASUERUS.

How restless and impatient thou dost make me!
Yet all shall be according to thy wishes.

• (To his attendants.) •

Let the Queen's invitation be convey'd
To Haman's ear, bid him not fail to come.

Scene 8.

AHASUERUS, ESTHER, ELIZABETH, TAMAR, HYDASPES,
SOME OF THE CHORUS.

HYDASPES.

The wise Chaldeans, call'd by thy command,
Are all assembled in the hall of audience.

AHASUERUS.

A strange dream, Esther, occupies my thoughts;
And in their answer thou too art concern'd
As well as I. Come, and behind a curtain
Hear what is said, and help me with the light
Of thy clear judgment. For myself and thee
I fear some secret foe.

ESTHER.

Follow me, Tamar.

You, timid maidens, stay till I return,
And, shelter'd by this throne, fear no rude eye.

Scene 9.

ELIZABETH, SOME OF THE CHORUS.

(This scene is partly spoken and partly sung.)

ELIZABETH.

What think ye, sisters, of our present state?
Esther or Haman, which will win the day?
The issue of the struggle we await,
Will it the pow'r of man or God display?
Ye saw what wrath, that struck us all with fear,
Flash'd from the Monarch's eyes in glance severe.

ONE OF THE JEWISH MAIDENS.

It dazzled like the lightning in the sky.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

And when he spake 'twas like the thunder's roar.

ELIZABETH.

How did that wrath, so terrible before,
All in a moment vanish from his eye?

ONE MAIDEN *sings*.

That stern heart in a moment has grow mild,
More like a gentle lamb than lion wild.
God, our own God, has made the storm to cease,
And lull'd the waves to peace.

THE CHORUS *sings*.

God, our own God, has made the storm to cease,
And lull'd the waves to peace.

THE SAME MAIDEN *sings*.

As flowing streams obey
The hand that marks the course that they should go,

And on the land fertility bestow,
Where'er their waters stray
Thus Thou, O God, Whose will our own doth guide,
Canst turn the hearts of kings from side to side.

ELIZABETH.

Ah, sisters, how I dread the dismal mists
That shroud the Monarch's eyes from Heaven's light!
The worship of his gods distorts his sight!

ONE MAIDEN.

Their hateful service all his zeal enlists.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

To all the lifeless fires that Heav'n displays
He impious homage pays.

ANOTHER.

His palace with their images is stored.

THE CHORUS *sings*.

Unhappy ye who leave man's Sovereign Lord,
Who have the work of your own hands adored!

ONE MAIDEN *sings*.

O Israel's God, scatter the shades of night :
• When will compassion touch Thee for our tears ?
Shrouded in darkness all the world appears ;
Rend Thou the veil that hides Thee from men's sight.
O God of Israel, let the dawn arise :
How long wilt Thou be hidden from our eyes ?

ONE OF THE YOUNGEST MAIDENS.

More softly, sisters, lest we be betray'd
To unbelieving ears in ambush laid.

ELIZABETH.

Daughter of Abraham, can fear already
Make thy voice feeble and thy faith unsteady ?

What wouldst thou do, should impious Haman try
To make thy timid lips blaspheme
Th' Almighty, while the threat'ning gleam
Of his uplifted sword struck terror on thine eye?

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

It may be that the King, in wrath profane,
If we to bow th' adoring knee refuse
Before dumb idols vile and vain,
Shall give command that we be slain.
Then life or death, dear sister, wilt thou choose?

THE YOUNG MAIDEN.

The God I love how can my lips betray?
Shall I adore a god deaf, dumb, and blind,
Hewn from a tree laid prostrate by the wind,
That cannot help itself in any way?

THE CHORUS *sings*.

Those who such helpless gods implore
Waste breath on empty air.
Give them and all the demons they adore
Confusion and despair!

ONE MAIDEN *sings*.

Let heart and mouth and every pow'r I have
Praise the great God Who life and nurture gave.
In trouble and distress,
My soul, His goodness bless
E'en should He slay me, Him will I confess.
Let heart and mouth and every pow'r I have
Praise the great God Who life and nurture gave.

ELIZABETH.

Shall impious pomp my admiration win?

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

Let others envy wealth that follows sin.

ELIZABETH.

The wicked seem to lack no happiness
Gold glitters on their dress;
In riches and in pride they know no bound,
The voice of mirth is in their dwellings found,
They wake from sleep at music's dulcet sound;
No hardships and no want their heart oppress.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

To crown the wicked man's prosperity,
He lives again in his posterity;
Gay troops of children round his board grow up,
And share his joy from the same brimming cup.
(*All the rest is sung.*)

THE CHORUS.

The world counts happy all such men as these,
On whom good fortune in abundance flows;
But happier far those who Jehovah please,
And in His holy name their trust repose!

ONE MAIDEN (*alone*).

Food for his frivolous desires to find,
The foolish man consumes himself in vain:
For wormwood will remain
In pleasure's cup behind.

ANOTHER MAIDEN (*alone*).

The wicked soul is like the troubled sea,
That tosses to and fro and cannot cease.
True joy can only be
In innocence and peace.

THE SAME (*with another*).

O peace sweet joy that gives!
O light that never dies!
New beauty shall surprise

The happy soul that in thy favour lives !
 O peace sweet joy that gives !
 O light that never dies !
Happy the soul that in thy presence lives !

THE CHORUS.

 O peace sweet joy that gives !
 O light that never dies !
 New beauty shall surprise
The happy soul that in thy presence lives !
 O peace sweet joy that gives !

THE SAME MAIDEN (*alone*).

No peace for the wicked ! He seeks her in vain ;
No tranquil repose shall he ever attain ;
From vengeance without he cannot depart,
And remorse lays her finger of ice on his heart.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

In a moment the glory of wickedness dies,
For ever consumed in the dust of the grave ;
But more bright than the dawn, O my God, shall arise
Thy servants who fear Thee and walk in Thy ways.

THE CHORUS.

 O peace sweet joy that gives !
Happy the heart that in thy presence lives !

ELIZABETH *speaks*.

Sisters, I hear them call. These strains must end.
Let us once more upon our Queen attend.

ACT III.

Scene—ESTHER's garden, and one side of a pavilion, where a banquet is being held.

Scene 1.

HAMAN, ZERESH.

ZERESH.

This, then, is Esther's garden, gay with flow'rs,
And this the tent spread for the royal feast.
But while its door is still fast shut, do thou
List to the counsel of a wife who fears
Thy rashness. By the sacred bond between us,
Conceal, my lord, this wrath that blinds thy judgment ;
Clear from thy brow that frown of discontent ;
Reproaches and complaints no king can bear.
Of all the court thou only by the Queen
Art bidden. Then enjoy this happiness.
Against the ill that galls thee weigh the good.
Have I not heard thee say a hundred times :
The man too proud to swallow an affront,
Or wear a mask upon his countenance,
Should ne'er set foot within the courts of kings ?
There are mishaps a wise man must endure :
Oft has an insult borne without resentment
Served as a stepping-stone to highest honours.

HAMAN.

O grief ! O torture insupportable !
O shame, that never can be blotted out !
A cursèd Jew, humanity's disgrace,
Has by my hands in purple been array'd !
Not only did he triumph over me,
I was myself his herald, and proclaim'd
His glory, while he mock'd at my confusion ;
And all the people too saw with derision
My crimson'd countenance, and drew therefrom

Sure sign and presage of my coming fall.
Such sports as these delight thee, cruel King.
On me thou hast deceitful favours lavish'd,
Only to make me feel thy tyranny
The more, and crush me with the greater shame,

ZERESH.

Judge not the King so ill. His only motive
Is to reward a good and loyal service.
Must it not rather be matter for wonder
That payment should have been postpon'd so long ?
Besides, it was thine own advice he follow'd ;
Thou didst thyself dictate this sorry pageant.
Thy rank is only second to his own.
Knows he thy detestation of this Jew ?

HAMAN.

He knows that all he has he owes to me,
That I have trodden under foot for him
Remorse and fear and shame, with heart of brass
Advanced his pow'r, reduced the laws to silence,
And 'midst the groans of innocence have sought
And cherish'd for his sake curses and hatred.
And for reward I find myself exposed
By his barbarity to jeers and laughter !

ZERESH.

We are alone Why should we gloze the truth ?
This zeal on his behalf, that sacrificed
So much to make him great (between ourselves),
Was not thine own promotion its sole end ?
'To go no farther than these wretched Jews,
Dost thou not offer them in sacrifice
'To thine own spleen ? Hast thou no cause to fear
Malicious whispers ?—all at court are foes,
The people hate us. Ay, this very Jew,
Laden with honours, moves my dread in spite
Of mine own self. Ills are oft link'd together,
His race was alway fatal to thine own.
Learn how to profit by this light affront.

Fortune makes ready, it may be, to quit thee;
Her fickle wheel lifts up but to cast down;
Foretell her humour ere her hand grows weary.
What lure attracts thee higher? Gulfs abysmal
That open out before me make me shudder;
If thou should'st slip, frightful would be thy fall.
Seek somewhere else a calmer destiny;
Back to that distant Hellespont return,
The refuge of thy wandering sires of yore,
When Israel's vengeance, kindled to fierce fire,
Drove out all Amalek from wasted Seir.
Ere 't be too late, hide thee from Fortune's spite;
Our richest treasures shall be sent before us.
Leave me to manage the departure hence,
And, above all, secure our children's flight.
Meanwhile be only careful to conceal
Thy purpose. Gladly will I follow thee
As thou shalt see. The stormiest winds and waves
Are safer far than this deceitful court.
But I see some one walking quickly tow'ards thee.
It is Hydaspes.

Scene 2.

HAMAN, ZERESH, HYDASPES.

HYDASPES (*to HAMAN*).

I am come to fetch thee.
Whilst thou art absent, joy is in abeyance;
The King has sent me for thee. Linger not.

HAMAN.

Tell me, is Mordecai among the guests?

HYDASPES.

Take not that face of gloom to Esther's table.
Why should this Jew for ever blast thy peace?
Let him enjoy a triumph of no moment:
He cannot think thus to escape the rigour

Of the King's sentence. Dost thou not possess
His ear and heart? The punishment of crime
Will follow zeal rewarded, and thy victim
Is deck'd for sacrifice. I'm much mistaken,
Or thou shalt reap, supported by the Queen,
Success beyond thy hopes.

HAMAN.

Can I believe
These happy tidings?

HYDASPES.

I have heard the answer
Of the diviners: that a foreign traitor
In the Queen's blood seeks to imbrue his hand.
And, knowing not where else to fix the guilt,
The King imputes it to the Jews alone.

HAMAN.

Ay, they are monsters; he has cause to dread
Their daring leader most of all, my friend.
Earth has endured the loathsome race too long;
The sooner she is rid of them the better.
Ah! I can breathe at last. Farewell, dear Zeresh.

HYDASPES.

Esther's companions are advancing near us,
With songs no doubt to celebrate the feast.
Enter, and be assured of ready welcome

Scene 3.

ELIZABETH, THE CHORUS.

(The first part is spoken, not sung.)

A JEWISH MAIDEN.

'Tis Haman!

ANOTHER.

Yes, 'tis he; I know him well,
And tremble.

THE FIRST MAIDEN.

Fear and horror round me press.

THE SECOND.

'Tis the proud enemy of Israel!

THE FIRST MAIDEN.

Ay, he who troubles all the earth no less.

ELIZABETH.

Who, seeing, cannot recognize that face?
Pride and disdain each feature plainly shows.

A MAIDEN.

His eye with rage and wildest fury glows.

ANOTHER.

Before him Death seems constantly to pace.

• ONE OF THE YOUNGEST MAIDENS.

Does this fell tiger know his destined prey?

For, when he cast on us his hungry eyes,
A fierce delight therein appear'd to play,
Whereat I still feel fear and horror rise.

ELIZABETH.

How this new honour will increase his pride!
To Esther's board he hastes with willing feet:

I see him, sisters, boldly take his seat,
As tho' it were his right, at the King's side.

ONE OF THE MAIDENS.

Tell me, attendants at the feast, what fare,
What wine for cruel Haman ye prepare.

ANOTHER.

The orphan's blood.

A THIRD.

The tears of the oppress.

THE SECOND.

Such are the dainties that delight him best

THE THIRD.

No other drink he finds so rich and rare.

ELIZABETH.

Dear sisters, let your grief be hush'd awhile.
They bid us sing. Oh, may our songs have skill
The King from his harsh temper to beguile,
As David erst Saul's jealous rage could still.
And with sweet strains divert his savage will.

(All the rest of this scene is sung.)

A JEWISH MAIDEN.

What happiness those subjects find,
Whose king magnanimous and kind,
Dreaded by others, to their love doth cling!
Oh, happy such a people, such a king!

ALL THE CHORUS.

O sweet and calm repose!
What a firm pledge it is of joy and peace,
When a wise monarch knows
How to make truth and righteousness increase,
And prudent counsel shows!

(*The four following stanzas are sung alternately by a single voice and by all the Chorus.*)

Ye kings, drive calumny away ;
Her slanderous assaults can mar
States that at peace and quiet are,
To discord harmony betray.

Thirsting for blood, she madly tracks
The pure and blameless everywhere.
Kings, of her murderous tongue beware,
That slays the good behind their backs.

This monster, ere her prey she grips,
Ofttimes a mask of mildness wears ;
Fear her, for in her heart she bears
Revenge, with pity on her lips.

Subtle and dexterous deceit
Strews all her paths with blossoms gay,
But, in her rear, along the way
Comes vain regret with tardy feet.

A JEWISH MAIDEN (*alone*).

As thunder clouds before the north wind fly,
And threat'ning tempests vanish from the sky ;
So treacherous imposture cannot brook
An upright monarch's lie-dispelling look.

•
ANOTHER.

A king with conquest crown'd we praise,
Whose valour wins victorious bays ;
But one who hates injustice, and is wise,
Who suffers not the poor to feel
The pressure of the rich man's heel,
As Heaven's fairest gift we well may prize.

•
ANOTHER.

The widow trusts him, and well arm'd is she.

•
ANOTHER.

A father to the fatherless is he.

•

ALL TOGETHER.

The just man's tears, appealing to his might,—
Are precious in his sight.

ONE MAIDEN (*alone*).

Turn, turn thine ears, great King, away
From cruel counsels by deception bred.
The time is come, awake to-day ;
Ere guiltless blood thine hand unwitting shed,
Whilst slumbers on thine eyelids weigh.
Turn, turn thine ears, great King, away
From cruel counsels by deception bred.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

So may the whole world tremble 'neath thine arm,
So may thy valour far renown'd avail
To strike thy foes ever with fresh alarm !
If they attack thee, may they quickly fail !
Let them be routed by thy strong right hand,
The terror of thy name their troops disband !
May their vast host like feeble infants yield,
When they the onset of thy soldiers meet ;
If by one line of march they take the field,
May thousands be too few for their retreat.

Scene 4.

AHASUERUS, ESTHER, HAMAN, ELIZABETH, THE CHORUS.

AHASUERUS (*to ESTHER*).

Ah, yes, thy slightest words have secret charms ;
A graceful modesty on every act
Bestows a value above gold and purple.
What happy clime conceal'd so rare a treasure ?
Who was the virtuous mother at whose breast
Thine infancy was nursed, whose wise hand train'd
Thy childhood ? Tell me quickly thy request :
Whatever thou desirest shall be granted,

E'en should'st thou ask, dear Esther, half my kingdom ;
So have I said, and gladly say again.

ESTHER.

No such exorbitant desire is mine.

But since I must at last explain my sighs,

Seeing my King himself will have me speak,

(She casts herself at the King's feet.)

I venture to beseech thee for my lite,

And for the lives of all that hapless race •

Which thou hast doom'd to be destroy'd with me.

AHASUERUS (*lifting her up*).

Destroy'd with thee? What mystery is this?

HAMAN (*aside*).

I tremble.

ESTHER.

Esther's father was a Jew :

Thou knowest, Sire, thy pitiless decree.

HAMAN (*aside*).

Gods !

AHASUERUS.

Oh, how deeply dost thou pierce my heart!

The daughter of a Jew! My best beloved,

My Esther, innocence and gentleness

Itself, whom I esteem'd Heav'n's choicest gift,

Can she have sprung from origin so vile?

Wretched am I !

ESTHER.

Thou may'st reject my pray'r :

But I would claim at least as a last boon

That thou should'st hear my story to the end,

Nor suffer Haman's voice to interrupt.

AHASUERUS.

Speak.

ESTHER.

O my God, confound shameless imposture !
These Jews of whom thou wouldest rid the world,
Whom thou dost deem the refuse of mankind,
Were once possessors of a wealthy land,
And, while they still adored their fathers God,
Found that His blessing brought prosperity.

This God, sole Master of the earth and skies,
Cannot be represented to the sight
By any form ; Jehovah is His name,
The world's Creator. When the meek are wrong'd
He hears their sighs, judges with equal laws
All mortals, yea, examines kings themselves
From His high throne. He but withdraws His hand,
And strongest States fall with a startling crash.
The Jews presumed to worship other gods ;
King, people, all were scatter'd in a day,
And Babylon's yoke of slavery was made
The just reward of their ingratitude.

But to requite our masters in their turn
The Lord chose Cyrus ere he saw the light,
Promised his aid, and call'd him by his name.
Born in due time, He arm'd him with His thunders-
To break their ramparts down and gates of brass,
Into his hands gave princes for a spoil,
Avenged His temple's pillage and destruction,
And for our tears forced Babylon to pay
With usury. Victorious thro' Him,
Cyrus proclaim'd His praise, and favour'd us,
His people, gave us back our laws and feasts
Divine, and from its ruins raised the temple.
But his mad son, heir of so wise a father,
Forbade the progress of the work begun,
Deaf to our cries. God cast his stock aside,
Cut off the monster, put thee in his place.
What hoped we not from such a noble king !
" God pitying looks on His unhappy people : "
We said : " a King now reigns who is the friend
Of innocence ! " His mercy was extoll'd
By all, and from the Jews loud shouts of joy

Were heard. • What, gracious Heaven ! Must the ear
Of princes the most mild be aye beset
By cruelty, and goodness at its source
Be poison'd ? From the heart of Thrace there came
A savage born and bred, here to breathe forth
Slaughter and threats, a minister who hates
• Thy greatest glory—

HAMAN.

I ? Canst thou believe it ?
I have no other end, no other god— •

AHASUERUS.

Be silent, till I order thee to speak.

ESTHER.

Our cruel enemy betrays himself :
Yes, it is he, that barbarous minister
Who has deceived thee with a cloak of zeal,
And arm'd thy virtue against innocence.
Who but a ruthless Scythian, O my God,
Could have suggested such a frightful order !
One simultaneous signal everywhere
Will fill with murders the astonish'd world,
Seeing a foreign traitor in the name
Of the most just of kings wasting thy realms ;
While in thy palace, victims of his wrath,
Thy slaughter'd subjects with their blood defile
The throne.

What crime does his envenom'd hatred
Charge to the Jews ? Have they awaken'd war
Within thy borders ? Have they join'd thy foes ?
Was ever thralldom's yoke more mildly borne ?
Adoring in their chains God's chastisement,
Whilst thou with heavy hand upon them laid
Did'st give them up defenceless to their foes,
They still besought that God to guard thy life,
To shatter the devices of the wicked,
And o'er thy throne to spread His shadowing wings.
He has been thine upholder, doubt it not :
Parthian and Indian he alone subdued

Beneath thy feet, scatter'd the countless hosts
Of Scythia, and inclosed the seas within
Thy vast domains. He to a Jew reveal'd
The plot two traitors hatch'd against thy life.
Alas ! I was that Jew's adopted daughter.

AHASUERUS.

What ! Mordecai ?

ESTHER.

He only of our house.
Remain'd, my father's brother, like myself
From our first king's unhappy blood descended.
Viewing with horror an Amalekite,
One of a race cursed by our God Himself,
He could not bow the knee, before this Haman,
Nor pay him honours that he thinks are due
To thee alone : hence, howsoe'er disguised,
This hatred 'gainst the Jews and Mordecai !
In vain hast thou bestow'd on him thy favours ;
At Haman's door already is prepared
The instrument of ignominious death ;
Within an hour this venerable man,
Dragg'd by his order from thy palace gates,
Wearing thy purple robe, is to be hang'd.

AHASUERUS.

What dreadful light bursts on my startled soul !
How my blood boils with anger and with shame !
I was the dupe, then—Heav'n vouchsafe to make
This matter clear ! A moment let me have
To breathe alone. Call Mordecai, I'll hear
His story too.

(The King retires.)

A JEWISH MAIDEN.

Let Truth from Heav'n appear !

Scene 5.

ESTHER, HAMAN, ELIZABETH, THE CHORUS. •

•
HAMAN (*to ESTHER*).

I am confounded with astonishment;
Deceived, betray'd by the Jews' enemies.
Heav'n be my witness that I thought to make
Thy life secure, whoever else might perish.
Command my influence on their behalf;
The King, as thou canst see, wavers perplex'd.
I can restrain him, I can urge him on,
And at my pleasure raise or lull the storm.
Behold me willing to befriend the Jews.
Speak: and the instant slaughter of your foes,
Victims to ratify a solemn oath,
Shall make atonement for my fatal error.
What blood dost thou require?

ESTHER.

Go, traitor, leave me.
The Jews want nothing from a wretch like thee.
God, the Avenger of the innocent
Already weighs thee in the scales of justice!
Soon will His righteous sentence be pronounced.
Tremble; His day draws nigh, thy reign is past.

HAMAN.

Yea, I confess, your God is to be fear'd.
But doth He bid you keep relentless hatred?
My pride is humbled, I am forced to beg
For mercy; haughty Haman kneels before thee.
• (*He casts himself at her feet.*)
As thou would'st save thy people, and dost honour
Thine uncle's hoary head, by these thy feet
Which I embrace, appease a dreadful king;
Save Haman crouching, trembling at thy knees!

Scene 6.

AHASUERUS, ESTHER, HAMAN, ELIZABETH, THE CHORUS,
AND GUARDS.

AHASUERUS.

What! Dares the traitor lay his hands on thee?
In the confusion of his look I read
His perfidy, confirming all thy words,
And his whole course of villainy recalling.
Let not this monster live a moment longer;
At his own door instead of Mordecai,
Both heav'n and earth appeasing by his death,
Let him afford a feast for just revenge.
(Haman is led away by the Guards.)

Scene 7.

AHASUERUS, ESTHER, MORDECAI, ELIZABETH, THE
CHORUS.

AHASUERUS *(continuing to address MORDECAI)*.

Mortal beloved of Heaven, my soul's preserver,
No more am I the prey of evil counsels;
Mine eyes have been unseal'd, and crime confounded;
Come, shine beside me in thy proper sphere.
I give thee Haman's wealth and Haman's pow'r;
Justly possess what his injustice seized.
I break the yoke 'neath which the Jews have groan'd;
To them I yield the blood of all their foes.
Henceforth let Jews be honour'd equally
With Persians; all shall tremble at the name
Of Esther's God. Rebuild His temple, fill
Your wasted cities; let your happy seed
With sacred triumph celebrate this day,
And in their memory live my name for aye!

Scene 8.

AHASUERUS, ESTHER, MORDECAI, ASAPH, ELIZABETH, THE CHORUS.

AHASUERUS.

What is it, Asaph?

ASAPH.

He is dead, O King.
Half torn asunder by the people's fury,
Dragg'd through the streets, the traitor's mangled corpse
They bear, a horrid spectacle of blood.

MORDECAI.

May Heaven ever guard our Monarch's life !
The Jews are in sore peril and in need
Of instant succour.

AHASUERUS.

Yes, I understand thee.
Let us go countermand the bloody orders
Of wicked Haman.

ESTHER

God, Thy will is wrought
By ways of wisdom that pass human thought !

Scene 9.

THE CHORUS.

ALL THE CHORUS.

That innocence has triumph'd God be praised,
To celebrate His pow'r our voices raised.

A JEWISH MAIDEN.

He saw the wicked leagued against our life,
Laid bare the murderous knife

To shed our blood like water on the ground. *

His voice from Heav'n doth sound,
And the proud boaster wallows in the dust,
His own sharp arrows in his bosom thrust.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

I saw the bold blasphemer set on high;
Like the tall cedar did he lift his head
Whose branches far above the earth are spread;
He seem'd to wield the thunders of the sky,
His vanquish'd foes beneath him did he tread,
Scarce had I pass'd, and God had struck him dead!

ANOTHER.

Ill counsel oft the justest kings beguiles;
Themselves too upright to deceive,
Heedless of toils the wicked weave,
They fall an easy prey to subtle wiles.
A noble heart is backward to believe
Another's malice, to his baseness blind,
By its own feelings to judge all inclined.

ANOTHER.

How has the storm been hush'd to peace?

ANOTHER.

Whose hand has made the tempest cease?

ALL THE CHORUS.

To gentle Esther owe we this release.

A JEWISH MAIDEN (*alone*).

Her heart was kindled by the love of God;
Ready to meet her death with dauntless breast,
Her ardent zeal the path of danger trod:
She dared to speak, and Heav'n has done the rest. *

TWO JEWISH MAIDENS.

Esther has triumph'd, Persia's dames retire;
To swell her charms Nature and Heav'n conspire.

• ONE OF THE TWO.

What guileless graces in each glance are seen!
Say, was there ever such a lovely queen?

THE OTHER.

The virtues of her heart yet more abound.
Was ever queen so good and gracious crown'd?

BOTH TOGETHER.

Esther has triumph'd, Persia's dames retire;
To swell her charms Nature and Heav'n conspire.

ONE MAIDEN (*alone*).

Thy God, O Zion, is displeased no more;
Rejoice, and out of dust and ashes rise;
Throw off the garments that the captive wore,
And let thy former splendour greet our eyes.
The ways lie open to your land again;
Break every chain,
Tribes captive bound
On foreign ground,
Gather from east and west and south and north;
Though seas and mountains must be pass'd, go forth.

ALL THE CHORUS.

Break every chain,
Tribes captive bound
On foreign ground
Gather from east and west and south and north;
Though seas and mountains must be pass'd, go forth.

A JEWISH MAIDEN (*alone*).

Those fields beloved once more shall meet mine eye.

• ANOTHER MAIDEN.

I'll weep where my forefathers' ashes lie.

ALL THE CHORUS.

Gather from east and west and south and north;
Though seas and mountains must be pass'd, go forth.

A JEWISH MAIDEN (*alone*).

Once more, once more the stately porches raise
 Of God's own temple, where He heareth pray'¹,
 To deck His altar purest gold prepare;
 Out of the mountains hew ye marbles rare.
 Dark Lebanon let fall
 Thine ancient cedars tall;
 Make ready, holy priests, to sing His praise.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

To dwell with us again doth God descend:
 Tremble thou earth with gladness and with fear.
 His holiness and glory to revere,
 Ye heav'ns in lowliest adoration bend!

ANOTHER.

How good is Israel's God, His yoke how sweet!
 Blest those who in their youth that sweetness know!
 Ye children, run that gracious Lord to meet;
 No earthly pleasure can for charm compete
 With heartfelt joys that from His presence flow.
 How good is Israel's God, His yoke how sweet!
 Blest those who in their youth that sweetness know!

ANOTHER.

Ready to pardon and forego His wrath,
 Of thankless souls that wander from His path
 He waiteth the return;
 He can excuse our weak and wayward wills;
 To seek us He doth yearn.
 Less tenderness for her own offspring fills
 A mother's heart. Ah! Who can share the love
 We owe to God above?

THREE JEWISH MAIDENS.

We in His might alone have victory won.

ONE OF THE THREE. °

His glory shineth on us like the sun.

ALL THREE TOGETHER. •

Ah! Who can share the love
We owe to God above?

ALL THE CHORUS.

Blest be His holy name, His name adore;
His mighty acts enforce
Till Time has run its course,
Praise Him for ever and for evermore!

ATHALIAH.

A TRAGEDY.

1691.

INTRODUCTION TO ATHALIAH.

THIS fine play, with which Racine's dramatic career fitly concluded, was composed, like "Esther," for semi-private performance by the young ladies of the College of Saint Cyr, where it was first acted, as well as afterwards, at Versailles, in 1691. It was not represented at a public theatre till 1716, a delay due, it may be, in some measure to its sacred character, though probably quite as much to the general lack of appreciation with which it had for long to contend. It is now universally acknowledged to deserve either first or second place among Racine's masterpieces, "Phèdre" and "Athalie" being rivals for the palm.

The scriptural narrative is faithfully followed as the main outline of the plot; and whatever Racine has added, such as Athaliah's dream, her first sight of the youthful Joash, and the characters of Abner and Mattan, so far from presenting incongruous elements, enhances the dramatic interest of the story.

CHARACTERS.

JOASH. *King of Judah and Son of Ahaziah.*

ATHALIAH, *Widow of Joram, and Grandmother of Joash.*

JEHOIADA, *the High Priest.*

JEHOSHEBA, *Aunt of Joash, and Wife of the High Priest.*

ZACHARIAH, *Son of Jehoiada and Jehosheba.*

SALOME, *Sister of Zachariah.*

ABNER, *one of the Chief Officers of the Kings of Judah.*

**AZARIAH, ISHMAEL, and the three other Chiefs of the Priests
and Levites.**

MATTAN, *an Apostate priest; Chief Priest of Baal.*

NABAL, *confidential Friend of Mattan.*

HAGAR, *an Attendant of Athaliah.*

Band of Priests and Levites.

Attendants of Athaliah.

Nurse of Joash.

Chorus of young Maidens of the Tribe of Levi.

**The scene is laid in the Temple at Jerusalem, in an ante-chamber
of the High Priest's dwelling.**

ATHALIAH.

A TRAGEDY FOUNDED UPON HOLY SCRIPTURE.

ACT I.

Scene 1.

JEHOIADA AND ABNER.

ABNER.

Yea, to the Temple of the Lord I come,
To worship with the solemn rites of old,
To celebrate with thee the famous day
When from the holy mount our Law was giv'n.
How times are changed ! Soon as the sacred trump
With joyous blast announced this day's return,
The Temple porticoes, with garlands gay,
Could not contain the crowds of the devout ;
Before the altar they in order due,
Bringing the earliest harvest of their fields,
Offered those firstfruits to the Lord of all ;
Nor were there priests enough for sacrifice.
A woman's will has dared to check these throngs,
And turn'd the day's bright glory into gloom.
Scarce dare a few most zealous worshippers
Recall for us some shadow of the past ;
The rest are all forgetful of their God,
Or, e'en to Baal's altars flocking now,
In shameful orgies learn to bear their part,
And curse the Name on which their fathers call'd.
My soul is troubled,—naught will I conceal--
Lest Athaliah visit upon thee

Her vengeance, spurn all remnant of respect,
And tear thee from the altar of the Lord.

JEHOIADA.

Whence comes to thee this presage dark to-day?

ABNER.

Holy and righteous, how canst thou escape?
Long has she hated that rare constancy
Which adds new brilliance to thy mitred brow;
Long has she treated thy religious zeal
As obstinate sedition and revolt.
The shining virtues of thy faithful spouse
Have earned the special hatred of the Queen.
If Aaron's priesthood has devolved on thee,
Thy wife is sister to our latest king.
Mattan moreover, that apostate priest,
His foul desertion from our altars crowns
With eager persecution of all good,
And, worse than Athaliah, spurs her on.
'Tis not enough that in a foreign garb
The Levite serves at Baal's altar now,
This Temple is to him a sore offence,
And he would fain destroy the God he left.
No means he leaves untried to ruin thee,
And undermines with praise no less than blame.
He feigns for thee a treacherous kindness,
Masking the blackness of his venom thus.
Sometimes he prompts the Queen to dread thy power,
And sometimes, looking to her lust for gold,
Pretends that somewhere known to thee alone,
Thou hidest treasures David had amass'd.
For two days past the proud imperious Queen
Has seem'd as though consumed by baffled spite.
I saw her yesterday with furious eyes
Glare at this sacred place, and mark'd her well,
As if within the Temple's deep recess
Lurk'd God's avenger arm'd to punish her.
The more I think thereon, the less I doubt
On thee her wrath is ready now to burst,

And that, with all her mother's thirst for blood,
E'en in His shrine she will defy our God.

JEHOIADA.

He who enchains the fury of the waves
Knows how to curb the plots of wicked men.
Submitting humbly to His holy will,
I fear my God, and know no other fear.
And yet, I thank thee, Abner, for thy zeal
That o'er my peril keeps a watchful eye.
I see injustice chafes thine inmost heart,
Thou art a faithful son of Israel still.
For that may Heaven be bless'd! But secret wrath
And passive worth, art thou content with these?
Is faith sincere, if it declines to act?
An impious foreigner for eight long years
Has David's throne usurp'd, with all its rights,
Unpunish'd waded in our princes' blood,
Foul murderess of the children of her son,
And e'en against our God has raised her arm.
And thou, a pillar of this trembling state,
Bred in the camp of good Jehoshaphat,
Under his son Jehoram in command,
On whom alone our towns in terror lean'd
When Ahaziah's unexpected death
Scatter'd his armies before Jehu's face,
Say'st thou—"I fear the Lord and own His truth!"
Lo, by my mouth to thee the Lord replies,—
"What boots it that thou boast zeal for My Law?
Thinkest to honour Me by barren vows?
What fruit have I of all thy sacrifice?
Need I the blood of heifers and of goats?
Thy princes' blood cries out, and is not heard.
Break, break all compact with impiety,
Root up the crimes amidst My people rife,
And come and sacrifice thy victims then."

ABNER.

What can I do? The people have lost heart,
Judah is cow'd, and Benjamin is weak;

The day that saw their royal line extinct
Extinguish'd all their ancient valour too.
The Lord Himself, they say, withdraws from us,
Tho' once so jealous of His people's praise;
He sees unmoved their majesty abased,
And His compassion is at last worn out.
No more for us His mighty arm outstretch'd
With countless marvels terrifies our foes;
His Ark is dumb,—utters no oracle.

JEHOIADA.

Yet when did miracles abound as now?
When by more signs has God display'd His power?
Will ye have always eyes that cannot see,
Ungrateful people? Shall His mightiest deeds
Strike on your ears, nor ever move your hearts?
Say, my dear Abner, must I needs repeat
The wonders brought to pass in these our days;
The signal fall of Israel's tyrant kings,
And God found faithful to perform His threats;
Ahab destroy'd, and with his blood defiled
The plot of land which murder had usurp'd;
Hard by that fatal field Jezebel slain,
A Queen down trampled under horse's hoofs,
The dogs that lick'd up her inhuman blood,
The mangled limbs of her dishonour'd corpse;
The troop of living prophets brought to shame,
The fire from heav'n that on the altar fell;
Elijah's voice ruling the elements,
The skies thereby shut up, the earth like brass,
For three whole years left without rain or dew;
The dead arising at Elisha's word?
Recall, O Abner, these portentous signs,
God is to-day as He has always been,
He can unfold His glory when He will,
And ever in His mind His people dwell.

ABNER.

But where the promises so often made
To David and to Solomon his son?

Alas ! We hoped that from their fruitful stock
Kings were to issue in a numerous train ;
That over every nation, tribe, and tongue
One of their lineage should extend his sway,
Should everywhere make war and strife to cease.
And at his footstool see earth's proudest kings.

JEHOIADA.

And why distrust the promises of Heaven ?

ABNER.

That son of David, where shall he be found ?
Can Heav'n itself restore the living sap,
Of that dry tree, now wither'd at the root ?
E'en in his cradle Athaliah slew
The babe, and eight years after can he live ?
Ah ! might it be her fury miss'd its aim,
That of our royal blood some drop escaped—

JEHOIADA.

What would'st thou do ?

ABNER.

O happy day for me !
How gladly would I go to meet my king !
Doubt not that to his feet our eager tribes,—
But wherefore mock me with these idle dreams ?
Ill-fated heir of our victorious kings,
We had but Ahaziah, with his sons ;
By Jehu's darts I saw the father slain,
And thou his sons by his own mother murder'd.

JEHOIADA.

I cannot now explain ; but when the sun
Shall the third portion of his course complete,
Bringing the morning hour that bids to prayer,
Hither return and with the self-same zeal.
Then God may prove to thee by gracious deeds
His word is faithful still, and never fails.

So, for this solemn day I must prepare
And dawn already gilds the temple roof.

ABNER.

What gracious deed is this, to me unknown?
Tow'rd thee Jehosheba directs her steps;
I leave thee, and will join the faithful band
Brought hither by this solemn festival.

Scene 2.

JEHOIADA AND JEHOSEBA.

JEHOIADA.

Princess, the time is come for us to speak,
Thy happy theft can be no longer hid.
The insults of the enemies of God,
Abusing this our silence, have too long
Charged with unfaithfulness His promises.
Nay more; success has animated rage,
And Athaliah would to Baal burn,
E'en in God's courts, incense idolatrous.
Rear'd in His Temple 'neath th' Almighty's wing,
'Tis ours to show the King thine hands have saved.
He'll prove himself courageous as his sires,
Already in his wit beyond his age.
Ere I unfold his wondrous destiny,
I offer him to God by Whom kings reign;
Then, gathering straight our Levites and our priests,
I will proclaim their masters' long lost heir.

JEHOSEBA.

Knows he his name and noble fortune yet?

JEHOIADA.

He owns no other than Eliakim,
And thinks himself some foundling left to die,
Whom I in pity treated as my son.

JEHOSHEBA.

Ah ! from what perils I deliver'd him !
What danger is he now to meet once more !

JEHOIADA.

What ! Fails thy faith already in alarm ?

JEHOSHEBA.

My lord, I yield me to thy counsels wise.
Since first I snatch'd this precious babe from death,
I placed his welfare in thy careful hands ;
Yea, dreading e'en the fervour of my love,
I shun his presence where and when I can,
• For fear lest my unguarded heart betray
My secret with the tears I cannot check.
Three days and nights I thought that duty bade
Devote to weeping and impassion'd prayer.
Yet may it be allow'd me now to ask,
What friends thou hast ready to take thy side ?
Abner, brave Abner, will he lend his aid ?
Say, has he sworn to stand beside his King ?

JEHOIADA.

Abner, though on his faith we may rely,
Knows not as yet that any King is ours.

JEHOSHEBA.

Who is to guard young Joash ? Wilt thou trust
Obed or Amnon with so high a charge ?
My father's kindness they have often proved,—

JEHOIADA.

And sold themselves to Athaliah's will.

JEHOSHEBA.

Whom to her hirelings wilt thou then oppose ?

JEHOIADA.

Have I not said ? Our Levites and our priests.

JEHOSHEBA.

I know that, secretly assembled near,
Their numbers have been doubled by thy care ;
That full of love for thee, horror for her,
A great oath binds them, ere the trial come,
To David's heir when he shall be reveal'd.
But though with loyal ardour they may burn,
Can they unaided vindicate their king ?
Is zeal enough to cope with such a task ?
Doubt not the Queen, when the first rumour spreads
Of Ahaziah's son in hiding here,
Will gather all her savage troops around,
Besiege the Temple, and break down its gates.
Against such foes will sanctity avail,
And holy hands raised to the Lord in prayer ?
Their province is to intercede for guilt,
No blood but that of victims have they shed ;
Joash, perchance, sore wounded in their arms,—

JEHOIADA.

Countest as naught the God who fights for us ?
God, who protects the orphan's innocence,
And e'en in weakness manifests His might ;
God, who hates tyrants, and in Jezreel swore
He would root out Ahab and Jezebel ;
Who, striking Joram, husband of their child,
And Joram's son, their family pursued ;
Whose threatening arm, though for a time withheld,
Over that impious race is ever stretch'd ?

JEHOSHEBA.

Yea, 'tis His righteous sentence on them all
That makes me tremble for my brother's son,
Who knows if he, inheriting their guilt,
Was not at birth condemn'd to share their fate ?
Or whether God exempts him from the curse,
And will for David's sake his pardon seal ?
Ah ! his sad state when Heaven gave him me
Returns each moment to alarm my soul.

With slaughter'd princes was the chamber full ;
Dagger in hand, th' inexorable Queen
To bloodshed urged her barbarous soldiery,
And eagerly her murderous course pursued !
Young Joash, left for dead, there met my eyes ;
I seem to see his terror-stricken nurse
Still vainly crouching at the assassin's feet,
His drooping form clasp'd to her feeble breast.
I took him stain'd with blood. Bathing his face
My copious tears restored his vanish'd sense.
And, whether yet with fear or fond caress,
I felt the pressure of his tender arms.
Great God, forbid my love should be his bane,
Last relic of the faithful David now.
Bred in Thine House, and taught to love Thy Law,
He knows no other Father than Thyself.
If, ready to attack a murderous Queen,
Faith falters trembling at the danger nigh ;
If flesh and blood, disquieted this day,
Have shed too many tears, alarm'd for him ;
Heir of Thy holy promise, guard him well,
And for such weakness punish only me !

JEHOIADA.

Thy tears, Jehosheba, no blame deserve,
But God would have us trust Him as a Father.
He visits not with blind resentment sins
Of impious ancestors on pious sons.
All that remains of faithful Israel still
Will come to-day here to renew their vows ;
Deep as their reverence for David's race,
They hold abhorr'd the child of Jezebel ;
Joash will move them with his modest grace,
Seeming to light anew the glorious past ;
And the Lord's Voice, making our cause His own,
Will in His Temple to their hearts appeal.
Two faithless kings in turn have Him defied,
Now must a monarch to the throne be raised
Whose grateful memory shall bless the day
When God by His own priests his rights restored,
Who pluck'd him from th' oblivion of the tomb,

And David's Jamp rekindled when put out. *
Great God, if Thy foreknowledge sees him base,
Bent to forsake the paths that David trod,
Then let him be like fruit ere ripeness pluck'd
Or flower wither'd by a noisome blast !
But if this child, obedient to Thy will,
Is destined to advance Thy wise designs,
Now let the rightful heir the sceptre sway,
Give to my feeble hands his pow'rful foes,
And baffle in her plots a cruel Queen.
Vouchsafe, my God, on Nathan and on her
That spirit of blind foolishness to pour
Which leads deluded monarchs to their fall !
No more ; fare well. Our children with them bring
Maidens, of holiest stock the hallow'd seed.

Scene 3.

JEHOSHEBA, ZACHARIAH, SALOME, CHORUS.

JEHOSHEBA.

Dear Zachariah, go, nor stay thy steps,
Accompany thy venerable sire.

Daughters of Levi, young and faithful band,
Whom with His zeal the Lord already fires,
Who come so often here to share my sighs,
Children, my only joy in griefs profound ;
These gay festoons and coronets of flow'rs
Once well accorded with our stately feasts,
But now, alas, when shame and sorrow reign,
What offering is more fit than one of tears !
Already do I hear the solemn trump,
Soon will the Temple doors be opened wide,
While thither I myself prepare to go,
Sing, praise the God whose presence here ye seek.

Scene 4.

THE CHORUS.

ALL THE CHORUS SINGS.

His glory fills the universe sublime,
Lift to this God for aye the voice of prayer !
He reign'd supreme before the birth of Time ;
Sing of His loving care.

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

Vainly unrighteous force
Would still His people's praise that must have course ;
His Name shall perish ne'er.
Day tells to day His pow'r, from time to time ;
His glory fills the universe sublime ;
Sing of His loving care.

ALL THE CHORUS REPEATS.

His glory fills the universe sublime ;
Sing of His loving care.

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

He paints the flow'rs with all their lovely hues ;
The fruit to ripeness grows,
For daily He bestows
The day's warm sunshine, and the night's cool dews,
Nor does the grateful earth t' o'erpay the debt refuse.

ANOTHER VOICE.

The sun at His command spreads joy around,
'Tis from His bounteous hand its light proceeds ;
But in His Law, so pure, so holy found,
We hail His richest gift to meet our needs.

ANOTHER.

Oh ! mount of Sinai, let the memory stay
Of that for ever great and famous day,

When on thy flaming head,
In clouds conceal'd, the Lord reveal'd
To mortal eyes a ray from His own glory shed.
Tell us, why glow'd those lightning fires up there,
Why roll'd the smoke, why peal'd in troubled air
Thunder and trumpet's blare?
Came He that, back to primal Chaos hurl'd,
On its foundations of past ages whirl'd,
Came He to shake the world?

ANOTHER.

He came that He to Israel might reveal
Th' immortal lustre of His holy Law;
He came that to their hearts He might appeal,
To claim their lasting love, based upon reverent awe.

ALL THE CHORUS.

O Law divine and full of grace!
Justice and goodness all supreme!
What reason and what joy extreme,
Our love and trust in such a God to place!

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

From slavery's yoke He did our fathers save,
And for their desert-food sweet manna gave;
To us He gives His Laws, all gifts above
Save of Himself; for all He only claims our love.

THE CHORUS.

Justice and goodness all supreme!

THE SAME VOICE.

For them divided He the waters of the sea,
From the dry rock He made the torrent stream;
To us He gives His Laws, all gifts above
Save of Himself, for all He only claims our love.

THE CHORUS.

O Law divine and full of grace !

What reason, and what joy extreme,
Our love and trust in such a God to place !

•

ANOTHER VOICE (*alone*).

You who can only know a servile fear,
Whose thankless souls God's goodness fails to move ;
Does it to you so hard a task appear, .

So difficult to love ?

Slaves dread the tyrant's lash that makes them smart,
But children feel a love that binds the heart ;
To share God's lavish bounty you are fain,
But not to love again !

ALL THE CHORUS.

O Law divine and full of grace !

Justice and goodness all supreme !

What reason and what joy extreme,
Our love and trust in such a God to place !

ACT II.

Scene 1.

JEHOSHEBA, SALOME, CHORUS.

• •
JEHOSHEBA. .

Maidens, it is enough ; your songs must cease ;
'Tis time for us to join the public prayers.
The hour is come to celebrate the feast,
And in our turn before the Lord appear.

Scene 2.

JEHOSHEBA, ZACHARIAH SALOME AND CHORUS.

JEHOSHEBA.

What do I see? My son, what brings thee back?
So pale and breathless, whither dost thou run?

ZACHARIAH.

Mother!

JEHOSHEBA.

Speak, then!

ZACHARIAH.

The Temple is profaned!

JEHOSHEBA.

What?

ZACHARIAH.

And the altar of the Lord forsaken!

JEHOSHEBA.

I tremble. Quickly tell thy mother all.

ZACHARIAH.

My father, the High Priest, with all due rites
Presented to the Lord, Who feeds mankind,
The first loaves of the harvest we have reap'd,
And then, while offering with blood-stain'd hands,
The smoking inwards of the victims slain;
And, standing by his side, Eliakim
Help'd me to serve him, clad in linen stole;
While with the blood of sacrifice the priests
Sprinkled the altar and the worshippers,
There rose a tumult, and the people turn'd,
Sudden astonishment in every eye.
A woman—is to name her blasphemy?—
A woman—it was Athaliah's self.

JEHOSHEBA.

Great Heav'n !

ZACHARIAH.

Within the court reserved for men
This woman enters with uplifted brow,
Yea, and attempts to pass the limit set,
Where none but Levites have a right to come.
The people fly, all scatter'd in dismay ;
My father—ah, what wrath blazed from his eyes !
Moses to Pharaoh seem'd less terrible,—
“ Go, Queen,” my father said, “ and leave this place,
Bann'd to thy sex and thine impiety !
Comest to brave the majesty of God ? ”
And then the Queen, fiercely confronting him,
Seem'd as in act to utter blasphemies ;
I know not if the Angel of the Lord
Appear'd before her with a glittering sword,
But straight her tongue seem'd frozen in her mouth,
And all her boldness utterly abash'd ;
She could not move her eyes, in terror fix'd
And strange surprise on young Eliakim.

JEHOSHEBA.

What ! Did he stand there in her very sight ?

ZACHARIAH.

We both stood gazing on that cruel Queen,
Stricken with equal horror at our hearts ;
But soon the priests encompass'd us around,
And forced us to withdraw. I came to thee,
To tell the outrage done ; I know no more.

JEHOSHEBA.

Ah ! she would doubtless tear him from our arms,
Even at God's altar hunting for her prey.
Perchance, ere now, this child of many tears—
Oh God, remember David, see and save !

SALOME.

Who is he, thus to cause your tears to flow ?

ZACHARIAH.

Why should his life be threaten'd? Can it be?

SALOME.

What can the boy have done to enrage the Queen?

ZACHARIAH.

What fear they from a helpless orphan child?

JEHOSHERA.

She comes! She must not see us, let us go.

Scene 3.

ATHALIAH, ABNER, HAGAR, ATTENDANTS OF ATHALIAH.

HAGAR.

Madam, why stay in such a place as this,
Where every sight offends and wounds thine eye?
Leave to the priests this temple where they dwell;
Fly from this scene of tumult; and within
Thy palace, lull each troubled sense to rest.

ATHALIAH.

I cannot. Thou dost see me vex'd and weak.
Go thou, send word to Mattan that he come
With haste: oh! happy still, if by his aid
I find that peace I seek, and seek in vain!

(She seats herself.)

Scene 4.

ATHALIAH, ABNER, ATTENDANTS OF ATHALIAH.

ABNER.

Madam, forgive me if I dare defend him,
His zeal should not surprise you, For the God,

Whom we adore, Himself ordain'd it so,
And gave us charge to guard his altar well ;
The work of sacrifice to Aaron's sons,
And to the Levites place and task assign'd ;
To their descendants strictly He forbade
All fellowship with other deities.
Art thou the wife¹ and mother of our kings,
A stranger to our customs on this point ?
Dost thou not know our laws ? And must to-day—
But Mattan comes : with him I leave thee now.

•
ATHALIAH.

We need thy presence, Abner. Let it pass,
Jehoiada's presumptuous insolence,
With all that heap of superstitions vain
Which bid you keep your Temple to yourselves :
A subject far more urgent wakes alarm.
I know that from a child, rear'd in the camp,
Abner is generous, knowing how to pay
Alike to God and King the debt he owes.
Remain.

Scene 5.

ATHALIAH, ABNER, MATTAN, ATTENDANTS OF ATHALIAH.

MATTAN.

• Great Queen, is this a place for thee ?
What trouble stirs, what terror chills thine heart ?
What dost thou in the midst of enemies ?
Darest thou this unhallowed fane approach ?
Hast thou that bitter hatred cast away—

•
ATHALIAH.

Both of you¹ lend me an attentive ear.
I do not wish now to recall the past,
Nor give account to you for blood I shed.
A sense of duty prompted all my acts.
Nor will I take² for judge a hasty crowd ;

¹ Racine has " fille " (daughter) by an oversight,

Whate'er they may presume to spread abroad,
 My vindication Heav'n has made its care.
 My pow'r, establish'd on renown'd success,
 Has magnified my name from sea to sea;
 Jerusalem enjoys profoundest peace;
 The wandering Arab Jordan sees no more
 Ravage his borders with continual raids;
 Nor boasts Philistia over Judah now,
 And Syria owns me for a sister Queen.

Lastly the traitor, who destroy'd my House,
 And e'en to me thought to extend his rage,
 Jehu, fierce Jehu, in Samaria quails
 Before a mighty rival's rapid strokes,
 Whom I incited to attack my foe;
 And thus th' assassin leaves me mistress here,
 To reap the fruits of policy in peace.

But for some days a gnawing care has come,
 To check the flood of my prosperity.
 A dream (why should a dream disquiet me?)
 Preys on my heart, and keeps it ill at ease;
 I try to banish it; it haunts me still.

'Twas deepest night, when horror falls on man,
 My mother Jezebel before me stood,
 Richly attired as on the day she died,
 Her pride undaunted by misfortune's touch.
 That borrow'd brightness still her features wore,
 Which she would paint upon her wither'd face,
 To hide the ravages of ruthless age:

"Tremble," she said, "child worthy of myself;
 O'er thee too triumphs Judah's cruel god,
 And thou must fall into his dreadful hands,
 Whereat I grieve." With these alarming words,
 Her spectre o'er my bed appear'd to bend;
 I stretch'd my hands to clasp her; but I found
 Only a hideous mass of flesh and bones,
 Horribly bruised and mangled, dragg'd thro' mire,
 Bleeding and torn, whose limbs the dogs of prey
 Were growling over with devouring greed.

ABNER.

Great God!

ATHALIAH.

While thus disturb'd, before me rose
The vision of a boy in shining robe,
Such as the Hebrew priests are wont to wear.
My drooping spirits at his sight revived :
But while my troubled eyes, to peace restored,
Admired his noble air and modest grace,
I felt the sudden stroke of murderous steel
Plunged deeply by the traitor in my breast.
Perhaps to you this dream, so strangely mix'd,
May seem a work of chance, and I myself,
For long ashamed to let my fears prevail,
Referr'd it to a melancholy mood ;
But while its memory linger'd in my soul,
Twice in my sleep I saw that form again,
Twice the same child before my eyes appear'd,
Always about to stab me to the heart.

Worn out at last by horror's close pursuit,
I went to claim Baal's protecting care,
And, kneeling at his altars, find repose.
How strangely fear may sway our mortal minds !
And instinct seem'd to drive me to these courts,
To pacify the god whom Jews adore ;
I thought that offerings might appease his wrath,
That this their god might grow more merciful.
Baal's High Priest, my feebleness forgive !
I enter'd ; and the sacrifice was stay'd,
The people fled, Jehoiada in wrath
Advanced to meet me. As he spake, I saw
With terror and surprise that self-same boy
Who haunts me in my dreams. I saw him there ;
His mien the same, the same his linen stole,
His gait, his eyes, each feature of his face ;
It was himself ; beside th' High Priest he walk'd,
Till quickly they removed him from my sight.

That is the trouble which detains me here,
And thereon would I fain consult you both.
Mattan, what means this omen marvellous ?

MATTAN.

Coincidence so strange fills me with dread.

ATHALIAH.

But, Abner, hast thou seen this fatal child?
Who is he? What his family, his tribe?

ABNER.

Two children at the altar lend their aid,
One is the High Priest's son, the other is,
To me unknown.

MATTAN.

Why hesitate to act?
Your Majesty must needs secure them both.
'Tis known how I regard Jehoiada,
Seeking no vengeance for my private wrongs,
In all my warnings studying to be fair;
But, after all, were this indeed his son,
Would he one moment let the guilty live?

ABNER.

Of what crime can a child be capable?

MATTAN.

Heav'n show'd him with a dagger in his hand;
And Heav'n is just and wise, nor works in vain.
What more dost want?

ABNER.

But, trusting to a dream,
Say, would'st thou have us bathe in infant blood?
Ye know not yet his father nor his name.

MATTAN.

Enough for fear! I have considered all.
If from illustrious parentage he springs,
His ruin should be hasten'd by his rank;
If fate has placed him in a lot obscure,

What matters it if worthless blood be spilt ?
Must kings keep pace when justice lags behind ?
On promptitude their safety oft depends ;
No irksome scruples need their freedom check ;
To be suspected is all one with guilt.

ABNER.

Mattan ! Is this the language of a priest ?
Nursed in the lap of war, in carnage reared,
Stern agent of the vengeful wrath of Kings,
'Tis I who now must urge misfortune's plea !
And thou, who owest him a father's love,
A minister of peace in times of wrath,
Cloaking resentment with pretended zeal
Dost chafe that blood should flow so tardily !
Thou badest me, Madam, speak my honest thought :
What, then, is this that moves thy fear so much ?
A dream, a feeble child, whom, it may be
Too readily thy fancy recognised.

ATHALIAH.

Abner, I will admit I may be wrong,
Heeding too much, perchance, an idle dream.
More closely then must I behold that child,
And at my leisure scan his features well.
Let both the boys be brought before me now.

ABNER.

I fear—

ATHALIAH.

What ! Can they fail to grant me this ?
What reason could they have to say me no ?
'Twould rouse suspicion. Bid Jehoshéba,
Or else her husband bring the children here ;
I can at pleasure use a monarch's tone.
Abner, I tell thee candidly, your priests
Have cause to bless my kindness hitherto ;
I know how far they freely have discuss'd
My conduct, and abused my sovereign power ;
And yet they live, and yet their temple stands.

But soon, I feel, the limit may be pass'd
 Jehoiada must curb his savage zeal,
 And not provoke my wrath a second time.
 Go.

Scene 6.

ATHALIAH, MATTAN, ATTENDANTS OF ATHALIAH.

MATTAN.

I may now at last in freedom speak,
 And clearly set the truth before thine eyes.
 A growing monster in this temple lurks ;
 A tempest threatens, wait not till it breaks.
 Ere daylight Abner with th' High Priest conferr'd ;
 Thou knowest well his love for David's line.
 What if Jehoiada should in their ranks
 Foist this young child with whom Heav'n threatens thee,
 His son or not—

ATHALIAH.

Thou hast unseal'd mine eyes,
 And Heaven's warning vision grows distinct.
 But I would fain be free from every doubt :
 Children will readily betray their thoughts,
 One word will oft disclose some deep design.
 Let me, dear Mattan, see him, question him.
 Go thou, meanwhile, and secret orders give
 That all my Tyrians quickly arm themselves.

Scene 7.

JOASH, ATHALIAH, JEHOSEBA, ZACHARIAH, ABNER,
 SALOME, TWO LEVITES, CHORUS, ATTENDANTS
 OF ATHALIAH.

JEHOSEBA (*to the TWO LEVITES*).

Keep constant watch, ye servants of the Lord,
 Over these children, precious and beloved.

ABNER (*to JEHOSEBA*).

Take courage, Princess; they shall be my charge.

ATHALIAH.

Heav'ns! the more closely I examine him,—
'Tis he! And horror seizes me again.

(*pointing to JOASH.*)

Wife of Jehoiada, is this thy son?

JEHOSEBA.

He, Madam?

ATHALIAH.

He.

JEHOSEBA.

His mother? No, not I.
(*pointing to ZACHARIAH.*)

There is my son.

ATHALIAH (*to JOASH*).

Who is thy father, child?

Answer, thyself.

JEHOSEBA.

Heav'n till this very day—

ATHALIAH.

Why in such haste to answer for the boy?
It is for him to speak.

JEHOSEBA.

From one so young
What revelation canst thou hope to gain?

ATHALIAH.

The young are innocent; and simple truth
Their honest frankness knows not to disguise:
Let him explain all that concerns himself.

JEHOSHEBA (*aside*).

Great God, put now Thy wisdom in his mouth !

ATHALIAH.

What is thy name ?

JOASH.

My name's Eliakim.

ATHALIAH.

Thy father ?

JOASH.

Fatherless, they say, I am,
Cast since my birth upon the arms of God ;
I never knew my parents, who they were.

ATHALIAH.

Hast thou no parents ?

JOASH.

They abandon'd me.

ATHALIAH.

How ? and how long ago ?

JOASH.

When I was born.

ATHALIAH.

Where is thy home ? This can at least be told.

JOASH.

This Temple is my home ; none else I know.

ATHALIAH.

Where wast thou found ? Hast thou been told of that ?

JOASH.

'Midst cruel wolves, ready to eat me up.

ATHALIAH.

Who placed thee in this temple?

JOASH.

One unknown,
She gave no name, nor was she seen again.

ATHALIAH.

Whose guardian hands preserved thine infant years?

JOASH.

When did God e'er neglect His children's needs?
The feather'd nestlings He provides with food,
And o'er all nature spreads His bounty wide.
Daily I pray; and with a Father's care
He feeds me from the sacred offerings.

ATHALIAH.

New wonder comes to trouble and perplex!
The sweetness of his voice, his infant grace
Unconsciously make enmity give way
To—can it be compassion that I feel!

ABNER.

Madam, is this thy dreaded enemy?
'Tis evident thy dreams have played thee false;
Unless thy pity, which now seems to vex,
Should be the fatal blow that terrified.

ATHALIAH (*to JOASH and JEHOSEBA*).

Why are ye leaving?

JEHOSEBA.

Thou hast heard his tale:
His presence longer might be troublesome.

ATHALIAH (*to JOASH*).

Nay, child, come back. What dost thou all the day?

JOASH.

I worship God, and hear His Law explain'd ;
His holy volume I am taught to read,
And now to write it has my hand begun.

ATHALIAH.

What says that Law?

JOASH.

That God requires our love,
Avenges, soon or late, His Name blasphemed,
Is the protector of the fatherless,
Resists the proud, the murderer punishes.

ATHALIAH.

I understand. But all within these walls,
How are they occupied?

JOASH.

In praising God.

ATHALIAH.

Does God claim constant service here and prayer?

JOASH.

All else is banish'd from His holy courts.

ATHALIAH.

What pleasures hast thou?

JOASH.

Where God's altar stands,
I sometimes help th' High Priest to offer salt
Or incense, hear His lofty praises sung,
And see His stately ritual perform'd.

ATHALIAH.

What! Hast thou pastime none more sweet than that?
Sad lot for one so young; but come with me,
And see my palace and my splendour there.

JOASH.

God's goodness then would from my memory fade.

ATHALIAH.

I would not force thee to forget Him, child.

JOASH.

Thou dost not pray to Him.

ATHALIAH.

But thou shalt pray.

JOASH.

There I should hear another's name invoked.

ATHALIAH.

I serve my god: and thou shalt worship thine.
There are two powerful gods.

JOASH.

Thou must fear mine;
He only is the Lord, and thine is naught.

ATHALIAH.

Pleasures untold will I provide for thee.

JOASH.

The happiness of sinners melts away.

ATHALIAH.

Of sinners, who are they?

JEHOSHEBA.

Madam, excuse

A child—

ATHALIAH.

I like to see how ye have taught him;
And thou hast pleased me well, Eliakim,
Being, and that past doubt, no common child.
See thou, I am a queen, and have no heir;
Forsake this humble service, doff this garb,
And I will let thee share in all my wealth;
Make trial of my promise from this day;
Beside me at my table, everywhere,
Thou shalt receive the treatment of a son.

JOASH.

A son!

ATHALIAH.

Yes, speak.

JOASH.

And such a Father leave

For—

ATHALIAH.

Well, what?

JOASH.

Such a mother as thyself!

ATHALIAH (*to* JEHOSEBA).

His memory is good; in all he says
I recognise the lessons ye have given.
Yes, this is how, corrupting guileless youth,
Ye both improve the freedom ye enjoy,
Inciting them, to hatred and wild rage,
Until they shudder but to hear my name.

JEHOSHEBA.

Can our misfortunes be conceal'd from them?

All the world knows them; are they not thy boast?

ATHALIAH.

Yea; with just wrath, that I am proud to own,
My parents on my offspring I avenged.
Could I see sire¹ and brother massacred,
My mother from the palace roof cast down,
And the same day beheaded all at once
(Oh, horror!) fourscore² princes of the blood;
And all to avenge a pack of prophets slain,
Whose dangerous frenzies Jezebel had curb'd.
Have queens no heart, daughters no filial love,
That I should act the coward and the slave,
Too pitiful to cope with savages,
By rendering death for death, and blow for blow?
David's posterity from me received
Treatment no worse than had my father's sons!
Where should I be to-day, had I not quell'd
All weakness and a mother's tenderness,
Had not this hand of mine like water shed
My own heart's blood, and boldly check'd your plots?
Your god has vow'd implacable revenge;
Snapt is the link between thine house and mine,
David and all his offspring I abhor,
Tho' born of mine own blood I own them not.

JEHOSHEBA.

Thy plans have prospered. Let God see, and judge!

ATHALIAH.

Your god, forsooth, your only refuge left,
What will become of his predictions now?
Let him present you with that promised King,
That Son of David, waited for so long,—
We meet again. Farewell. I go content:
I wished to see, and I have seen.

¹ Ahab was in reality mortally wounded at the battle of Ramoth Gilead. (1 Kings xxii. 34.)

² Seventy, according to 2 Kings x. 7.

ABNER (*to JEHOSEBA*).

The trust
I undertook to keep, I thus resign.

Scene 8.

JOASH, JEHOSEBA, ZACHARIAH, SALOME, JEHOIADA.

ABNER, LEVITES, THE CHORUS.

JEHOSEBA (*to JEHOIADA*).

My lord, did'st hear the Queen's presumptuous words?

JEHOIADA.

I heard them all, and felt for thee the while.
These Levites were with me ready to aid
Or perish with you, such was our resolve.

(*To JOASH, embracing him.*)

May God watch o'er thee, child, whose courage bore,
Just now, such noble witness to His Name.
Thy service, Abner, has been well discharged:
I shall expect thee at th' appointed hour.
I must return, this impious murderess
Has stain'd my vision, and disturb'd my prayers;
The very pavement that her feet have trod
My hands shall sprinkle o'er with cleansing blood.

Scene 9.

CHORUS.

ONE OF THE MAIDENS FORMING THE CHORUS.

What star has burst upon our eyes?
What shall this wondrous child become one day?
Vain pomp and show he dares despise,
Nor lets those charms, where danger lies,
Lead his young feet from God astray.

ANOTHER VOICE.

While all to Baal's altar flock,
And for the Queen their faith disown,
A child proclaims that Israel's Rock
Is the eternal God alone,
And though this Jezebel may mock,
Elijah's spirit he has shown.

ANOTHER VOICE.

Who will the secret of thy birth explain?
Dear child, some holy prophet lives in thee again!

ANOTHER VOICE.

Thus grew the gentle Samuel of yore,
Beneath the shadow of God's dwelling-place;
And he became the hope of Israel's race,
To guide and comfort; this be thou and more!

ANOTHER VOICE.

Oh! blest beyond compare,
The child who knows His love,
Who early hears His voice, and keeps with care
The teaching he receives from God above!
Far severed from the world, from birth endued
With all the gifts of Heaven,
No evil influence has imbued
His innocence with sin's infectious leaven.

ALL THE CHORUS.

A happy youth he spends,
Whom the Lord teaches, whom the Lord defends!

THE SAME VOICE (*alone*).

As in sequester'd vale,
Where a clear streamlet flows,
Shelter'd from every stormy gale
Darling of Nature, some young lily grows.
Far severed from the world, from birth endued
With all the gifts of Heaven,

No evil influence has imbued
His innocence with sin's infectious leaven.

ALL THE CHORUS.

Best more than tongue can tell,
The child whom God inclines to keep His statutes well!

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

With faltering steps doth dawning Virtue tread
'Mid countless perils that beset the way;
What hindrances and snares for him are spread
Who seeks Thee, Lord, and fears from innocence to
stray!
Where can Thy saints a shelter find,
With foes in front and foes behind?
Sinners fill all the earth, my God, look where we may.

ANOTHER VOICE.

Palace and City, David loved so well,
O Mount, where God Himself long deigned to dwell,
What has thy crime that draws down vengeance been?
What sayest thou, dear Zion, to behold,
Seated where sat thy kings from days of old,
An impious foreign Queen?

ALL THE CHORUS.

What sayest thou, dear Zion, to behold
An impious foreign Queen,
Seated where sat thy kings from days of old?

THE SAME VOICE *continues*.

Where once the Lord was bless'd,
Father and God confess'd,
Where David's holy strains so sweet had been,
What sayest thou, dear Zion, to behold
Cursing the Name thy kings adored of old,
Praising her own false gods, an impious foreign Queen?

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

How often, Lord, how often yet shall we
Against Thee rising up the wicked see?

They with unhallow'd feet Thy courts defile,
And all who worship Thee as fools revile.
How often, Lord, how often yet shall we
Against Thee rising up the wicked see?

ANOTHER VOICE.

Ah, what avails, say they, this virtue stern,
That from sweet Pleasures voice
Morosely bids you turn?
Your God does naught for you to justify your choice.

ANOTHER VOICE. •

Where Pleasure leads, laughter and song be ours
Thus speak those impious throngs:
Care for the future to dull fools belongs,
To passion give the reins, cull the sweet flow'rs;
Too quickly at the best years take their flight,
Who knows if he shall see to-morrow's light?
Let us to-day enjoy life's fragrant bowers!

ALL THE CHORUS.

Let tears and terrors, Lord, their portion be,
These outcast wretches, who shall never see
Thy holy city with eternal glory crown'd;
Be ours, on whom Thy beams immortal shine,
To hymn Thy gifts divine,
Be ours with voice of praise Thy majesty to sound!

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

Of all their false delights what will remain
To souls absorb'd therein? As visions vain,
That vanish with the dawning day,
When they awaken with dismay!
While for the poor Thy table shall be spread,
Deep shall they drain the cup of judgment dread
That Thou shalt offer to all such as they,
When Mercy's hour has fled.

ALL THE CHORUS.

Oh, wakening of dismay
From dream too quickly sped,
From error's dangerous sway!

ACT III.

Scene 1.

MATTAN, NABAL, THE CHORUS.

MATTAN.

Go, damsels: let Jehosheba be told
That Mattan would in private speak with her.

ONE OF THE MAIDENS OF THE CHORUS.

Mattan! May God in Heav'n confound his plots!

NABAL.

They all disperse in flight without reply!

MATTAN.

Let us draw near.

Scene 2.

ZACHARIAH, MATTAN, NABAL.

ZACHARIAH.

Rash man, where would'st thou go?
Beware thou do not step beyond this spot;
This is a dwelling sacred to the priests;
Our laws forbid all common entrance here.
Whom seekest thou? This solemn day, my sire
Shuns contact with impure idolatry,

And prostrate now before Jehovah's shrine,
My mother will not have her pray'r disturb'd.

MATTAN.

My son, be not distress'd, we will wait here.
To your illustrious mother I would speak;
I come charged with a message from the Queen.

Scene 3.

MATTAN, NABAL.

NABAL.

Their very children ape their insolence !
But what means Athaliah now to do ?
Whence springs this indecision in her plans ?
This morn, rebuff'd by that presumptuous priest,
When dreams had warn'd of danger from a child,
Her mind was to destroy Jehoiada,
And in this temple Baal's altar place,
With thee to serve him ; in thy joy I shared,
Hoping to gain my part in the rich spoil.
What made her change her fickle purpose thus ?

MATTAN.

She has not been herself these two days past.
No more is she the bold, clear sighted Queen,
With spirit raised above her timid sex,
Whose rapid action overwhelm'd her foes,
Who knew the value of an instant lost :
Fear and remorse disturb that lofty soul ;
She wavers, falters, all the woman now.
Not long ago I fill'd with bitter wrath
Her heart already moved by threats from Heav'n,
And she, intrusting vengeance to my care,
Bade me assemble all her guard in haste ; •
But whether that young child, before her brought,
(A poor, unhappy foundling, as they say.)
Assuaged the terror that her dream had caused,
Or seeing in the boy some secret charm,

I find her shaken in her dire resolve,
Postponing vengeance to some future day ;
And fatal strife in all her counsels reigns.
"I have inquired," said I, "about that child,
And hear strange boasts of royal ancestry,
How to the malcontents, from time to time,
The High Priest shows him, bids the Jews expect
In him a second Moses, and supports
His speech with lying oracles." These words
Made her brow flush. Swiftly the falsehood work'd.
"Is it for me," she said, "to pine in doubt?
Let us be rid of this perplexity.
Convey my sentence to Jehosheba :
Soon shall the fire be kindled, and the sword
Deal slaughter, soon their Temple shall be razed,
Unless, as hostage for their loyalty,
They yield this child to me."

NABAL.

For one unknown,
Whom chance, may be, has thrown into their arms,
Will they behold their Temple buried low—

MATTAN.

Ah ! but no mortals have such pride as they.
Rather than to my hands resign a child,
Whom to his God Jehoiada has vow'd,
He will endure to die the worst of deaths,
Besides, they manifestly love this child,
And, if I construe right the Queen's account,
Jehoiada knows more than he will say
Touching his birth. Refusal I foresee,
In any case, with fatal consequence,
The rest be my concern ; with fire and sword
To wipe this odious Temple from my eyes
Is my last hope—

NABAL.

What prompts so fierce a hate ?
Is it consuming zeal for Baal's cause ?

Myself a child of Ishmael, as thou knowest,
I worship neither thine, nor Israel's god.

MATTAN.

Dost think, my friend, that any senseless zeal
For a dumb idol could my judgment blind,—
A perishable log, that worms destroy
In spite of all my efforts, day by day?
From birth devoted to the God, who here
Is worshipp'd, Mattan still might be his priest,
If but the love of grandeur, thirst for pow'r,
Could be consistent with his stringent yoke.
Nabal, I hardly need to thee recall
The quarrel 'tween Jehoiada and me,
When against him I dared the censor claim;
They made some stir, my struggle, tears, despair.
Vanquish'd, I enter'd on a new career,
And bound me, soul and body, to the Court.
By slow degrees I gain'd the ear of kings,
And soon my voice was deem'd oracular.
Their hearts I studied, flatter'd each caprice,
And sprinkled flow'rs for them on danger's brink.
Nothing to me was sacred that they craved,
Measure and weight I alter'd as they will'd.
As often as Jehoiada's blunt speech
Boldly offended their fastidious ears,
So often I had pow'r and skill to charm;
Concealing from their eyes unpleasant truths,
Gilding their savage passion with fair tints.
And lavish more than all of human blood.

At length was raised by Athaliah's hands
A temple to the god she introduced.
Jerusalem with tears the outrage saw;
The sons of Levi, stricken with alarm,
Appeal'd to Heaven with indignant cries.
I only, leading cowards in my train,
Deserter from their Law, that act approved,
And Baal's priesthood thereby merited.
Thus made my rival's formidable foe,
I donn'd the mitre; march'd along, his peer.

Still, I confess, e'en at my glory's height,
Harass'd by memories of the God I left,
Some fear remain'd to discompose my soul,
And this it is that fans and feeds my rage :
Happy if, wreaking vengeance on His shrine,
I may reduce His wrath to impotence,
And amidst ruin, desolation, death,
Lose my remorse in plenitude of crime !
Here comes Jehosheba.

Scene 4.

JEHOSHEBA, MATTAN, NABAL.

MATTAN.

Sent by the Queen
To bring back peace, and hatred drive away,
Be not surprised that I should thee accost,
Princess, whose gentle spirit comes from Heav'n,
A rumour, which of falsehood I suspect,
Supports the warning that a dream had giv'n,
Accusing the High Priest of dangerous plots,
And raising in the Queen a storm of ire.
I wish not here to vaunt my services,
Knowing Jehoiada to me unjust ;
But good for evil is a due return.
In short, I come commission'd to speak peace.
Live, keep your feasts without a shade of fear.
For your obedience she but asks a pledge,—
(My efforts to dissuade her have been vain),
This orphan, whom she says that she has seen.

JEHOSHEBA.

Eliakim ?

MATTAN.

Whereat I feel some shame
On her account, making an idle dream
Of too much moment. But unless ye give

This child to me forthwith, her mortal foes
Ye prove yourselves. Your answer she awaits,
Impatient.

JEHOSHEBA.

These, then, are her words of peace !

MATTAN.

And can ye for one moment hesitate
By slight concession such a boon to gain ?

JEHOSHEBA.

Strange would it be, if Mattan, free of guile,
Could trample down th' injustice of his heart.
And, after being of all ill contriver,
Could be the author of some shade of good !

MATTAN.

What is your grievance ? Has the Queen, in rage,
Sent to tear Zachariah from your arms ?
He is your son ; the other why so dear ?
This fondness, in my turn, surprises me.
What treasure find ye there of priceless worth ?
Has Heav'n in him sent a deliverer ?
Bethink you, your refusal may confirm
A secret rumour that begins to grow.

JEHOSHEBA.

What rumour ?

MATTAN.

That illustrious is his birth,
And that thy husband hatches some grand part
For him to play ?

JEHOSHEBA.

And Mattan, by this tale,
That soothes his rage—

MATTAN.

Princess, it is for thee

To disabuse my mind. I know thou would'st,
 As falsehood's ruthless foe, resign thy life
 Sooner than sully thy sincerity
 By the least word that is opposed to truth.
 Hast thou no clue then to this mystery?
 Is his birth buried in the deepest night?
 Knowest thou not thyself from whom he sprang?
 Whose hands they were that gave him to thy spouse?
 I pause for answer; ready to believe thee.
 Give glory, Princess, to the God thou servest.

JEHOSHEBA.

Base man, it suits thee well to dare to name
 A God whom thou hast taught men to blaspheme!
 Can such a wretch as thou invoke His truth,
 Thou on the seat of foul corruption throned,
 Where falsehood reigns and spreads its poison round,
 Whose lip with treachery and imposture teems!

Scene 5.

JEHOIADA, JEHOSHEBA, MATTAN, NABAL.

JEHOIADA.

Where am I? Is this Baal's priest I see?
 Does David's daughter with a traitor talk,
 And turn a listening ear? Dost thou not fear
 That 'neath his feet should gape a gulf profound,
 And flames forth issuing straight scorch and consume
 thee,
 Or these walls crush thee falling upon him?
 What would he? Why this bold effrontery?
 Why comes God's foe to taint this holy air?

MATTAN.

To rail is but to be Jehoiada!
 Yet might he well, in reverence for the Queen,
 Show greater prudence, and forbear to insult
 The chosen envoy of her high command.

JEHOIADA.

With what ill-omened tidings art thou charged?
What dreadful mission brings such messenger?

MATTAN.

Jehosheba has heard the royal will.

JEHOIADA.

Then get thee from my presence, impious wretch;
Go, and fill up the measure of thy crimes.
Soon will God make thee join the perjured crew
Of Dathan, Doeg, and Ahithophel;
The dogs He fed with fallen Jezebel,
Waiting to glut their fury upon thee,
Besiege thy door, all howling for their prey!

MATTAN (*in confusion*).

Ere the day close—which of us is to be—
’Twill soon be seen—but, Nabal, let us go.

NABAL.

Where dost thou stray? Is then thy sense distraught?
There lies thy way.

Scene 6.

JEHOIADA, JEHOSEBA.

JEHOSEBA.

The storm ’s about to burst:
The angry Queen demands Eliakim.
Already they begin to penetrate
The mystery of his birth and thy designs,
Mattan could all but tell his father’s name.

JEHOIADA.

Who to the traitor can have giv’n a clue?
Thine agitation may have told too much.

JEHOSHEBA.

I have done all I could to master it :
 And yet, believe me, danger presses close.
 Let us reserve this child for happier times.
 While still our wicked foes deliberate,
 Ere they come round to tear him from our arms,
 Let me, my lord, hide him a second time :
 The gates stand open, and the way is free.
 To wildest deserts must I carry him ?
 Ready am I. I know a secret path,
 By which, without a chance of being seen,
 Crossing the Kedron's torrent with the lad,
 The wilderness I'll gain, where wept of old
 David, in flight from his rebellious son,
 And seeking safety from pursuit like us.
 I shall fear less for him lions and bears—
 But why reject Jehu's good offices ?
 Is not the counsel sound that I unfold ?
 Let us in Jehu's charge this treasure place,
 And one may reach his realm this very day ;
 The way that leads to him is short. Nor starts
 The heart of Jehu from compassion's touch ;
 The name of David he in honour holds.
 Ah ! lives there king so cruel and so hard,
 Unless his mother were a Jezebel,
 Who would not pity such a suppliant's cry ?
 Must not all monarchs make his cause their own ?

JEHOIADA.

What timid counsels, and how boldly urged !
 Canst thou then place thy hopes in Jehu's aid ?

JEHOSHEBA.

Does God forbid all forethought and all care ?
 Condemns He not too blind a confidence ?
 Making mankind fulfil His holy ends,
 Is it not God Himself arms Jehu's hands ?

JEHOIADA.

Jehu, whom God in His deep wisdom chose

Jehu, on whom I see thy hopes are based,
Ungratefully forgets His benefits ;
Ahab's fierce daughter he has left in peace,
And follows the vile steps of Israel's kings,
Keeps up the shrines of Egypt's bestial god,
And on high places rashly dares to burn
An incense that the Lord our God abhors.
Jehu too surely lacks the upright heart,
And clean hands, needed to promote His cause.
No, we must cling to God, and Him alone.
We must not hide but plainly show the boy,
With royal diadem around his brow ;
I e'en intend to advance the appointed hour,
Ere Mattan can mature his counterplot.

Scene 7.

JEHOIADA, JEHOSEBA, AZARIAH (*followed by the CHORUS,
and a number of LEVITES*).

JEHOIADA.

Well, Azariah, is the Temple closed ?

AZARIAH.

I have seen all the gates securely barr'd.

JEHOIADA.

Remain there none but thou and thine allies ?

AZARIAH.

Twice have I gone all round the sacred courts,
All have fled hence, nor think they of return,
Scatter'd by panic like a flock of sheep ;
The holy tribe are left sole worshippers.
Never, since they escaped from Pharaoh's pow'r,
Has such dismay as this the people seized.

JEHOIADA.

Faint-hearted people, born for slavery,
 Bold only against God! Let us pursue
 The work we have in hand. But who still keeps
 These children in our midst?

ONE OF THE MAIDENS FORMING THE CHORUS.

Could we, my lord,
 Sever ourselves from you? No strangers we
 Here, in God's House, where ranged beside thee stand
 Our fathers and our brothers.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

If to avenge
 The shame of Israel we lack Jael's pow'r,
 Who pierced the temples of God's impious foe,
 We may at least for Him our lives lay down;
 When for His threaten'd shrine your arms shall fight,
 At least our tears may to His throne appeal.

JEHOIADA.

Lo, what avengers of Thy holy cause,
 O Wisdom infinite,—these priests and babes!
 But, Thou supporting, who can make them fall?
 Thou canst, at will, recall us from our graves,
 Canst wound and heal, canst kill and make alive.
 They put no trust in merits of their own,
 But in Thy Name, for them so oft invoked,
 Thy promise to the holiest of their kings,
 This Temple where Thou dost vouchsafe to dwell,
 Destined to last long as the sun in heaven.

Why throbs my heart with holy ecstasy?
 Is it God's Spirit thus takes hold of me,
 Glows in my breast, speaks, and unseals mine eyes?
 Before me spread dim distant ages rise.
 Ye Levites, let your melodies conspire
 To fan the flame of inspiration's fire.

THE CHORUS (*singing to the accompaniment of musical instruments*).

Lord, be Thy voice to our dull ears conveyed,
 Thy holy message to our hearts be borne,
 As to the tender blade
 Comes, in the spring, the freshness of the morn !

JEHOIADA.

Ye heavens hear my voice ; thou earth give ear :
 That the Lord sleeps, no more let Israel fear :
 The Lord awakes ! Ye sinners, disappear !

(*The music begins again, and JEHOIADA immediately resumes.*)

How has pure gold changed into worthless lead ?
 What Pontiff's blood is at the altar shed ?
 Weep, Salem ; faithless city, weep in vain !
 Thy murderous hands have God's own prophets slain :
 Therefore His love for thee hath banish'd been,
 Thine incense is to Him a smoke unclean.
 Oh, whither are these tender captives led ?
 The Lord the queen of cities hath discrown'd,
 Cast off her kings, her priests in fetters bound ;
 Within her streets no festal throngs are found :
 The Temple falls ! high leap the flames with cedar fed !
 Jerusalem, sad spectacle of woe,
 How in one day thy beauty disappears !
 Would that mine eyes might be a fount of tears,
 To weep thine overthrow !

AZARIAH.

Oh, holy shrine !

JEHOSHEBA.

Oh, David !

THE CHORUS.

Lord, restore.
 Favour to Thine own Zion, as of yore !

(*The music begins again, and JEHOIADA, a moment afterwards, breaks in upon it.*)

JEHOIADA.

What new Jerusalem is this draws nigh,
With beams of light that from the desert shine?
She bears upon her brow a mark divine:
Ye peoples, raise your joyous song on high!
Zion is born anew, far fairer to the eye.
From every side a gathering crowd I view,
Children that thine own bosom never knew;
Jerusalem arise, lift up thine head!
Thy glory fills with wonder all these kings,
Each monarch of the earth his homage brings.
Her mightiest kiss the dust where thou dost tread;
All press to hail the light around thee shed.
Blessèd be he whose soul with ardour glows
To see fair Zion rise!
Drop down your dews, ye skies,
And let the earth her Saviour now disclose!

JEHOSHEBA.

Ah, whence may we expect a gift so rare,
If those, from whom that Saviour is to spring,—

JEHOIADA.

Prepare, Jehosheba, the royal crown,
Which David wore upon his sacred brow :
(*To the Levites*)
And ye, to arm yourselves, come, follow me
Where are kept hidden, far from eyes profane,
That dread array of lances, and of swords,
Which once were drench'd with proud Philistia's blood,
And conquering David, full of years and fame,
Devoted to the Lord who shelter'd him.
Can we employ them for a nobler use?
Come ; and I will myself distribute them.

Scene 8.

SALOME, THE CHORUS.

SALOME.

What fearful scenes, my sisters, must we see !
These arms, great God, strange sacrifice portend :
What incense, what firstfruits do they intend
To offer on Thine altar unto Thee ?

ONE OF THE MAIDENS OF THE CHORUS

What sight is this to meet our timid eyes !
Who would have thought that we should e'er behold
Forests of spears arise,
And swords flash forth, where Peace has dwelt from days
of old ?

ANOTHER.

How comes it that, when danger is at hand,
Our city shows such dull indifference ?
How comes it, sisters, that for our defence
E'en valiant Abner leads no succouring band ?

SALOME.

Ah ! In a Court that owns no other laws
Than force and violence,
Who would embrace the inauspicious cause
Of youthful innocence ?
Baseness and blind submission there provide
High honours that to virtue are denied.

ANOTHER MAIDEN.

When danger and disorder grimly frown,
For whom thus bring they forth the consecrated crown ?

SALOME.

The Lord hath deign'd to speak
But vainly do we seek

His prophet's utterance to comprehend.
Arms He destructions upon us to wreak?
Or arms He to defend?

ALL THE CHORUS *sings*.

Promise and threat! What may this mystery be?
What evil and what good in turn foretold!
How with such anger can such love agree?
Who shall the clue unfold?

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

Zion shall perish in devouring flame
And all her beauty shall be overthrown.

ANOTHER VOICE.

Zion's defence is in Jehovah's Name,
His deathless word her sure foundation stone.

THE FIRST VOICE.

I see her glory sink before mine eyes!

THE SECOND VOICE.

The spreading radiance of her light I see!

THE FIRST VOICE.

Plunged in the deepest gulf of misery!

THE SECOND VOICE.

Zion uplifts her forehead to the skies!

THE FIRST VOICE.

What ruin!

THE SECOND VOICE.

Endless life to her belongs!

THE FIRST VOICE.

What cries of pain!

THE SECOND VOICE.

Hark to victorious songs!

A THIRD VOICE.

Cease these perplexing thoughts to trace,
God will the mystery solve, we know not how.

ALL THREE VOICES.

Before His wrath in reverence let us bow,
And let our hopes His love embrace.

ANOTHER VOICE.

The heart whose love is Thine,
My God, who can disturb its peace?
Thy will supreme its guiding star doth shine,
With beams that never cease:
What happiness in earth or heav'n can be
Like peace that keeps in sweet tranquillity,
The heart that loveth Thee?

ACT IV.

Scene 1.

JOASH, JEHOSEBA, ZACHARIAH, SALOME, A LEVITE, THE
CHORUS.

SALOME.

With step majestic, by my mother's side,
Comes with my brother young Eliakim.
Sisters, what bear they wrapp'd within those veils?
What means that sword carried in front of them?

JEHOSEBA (*to ZACHARIAH*).

My son, with reverence on this table place
The awful volume of our holy Law.

And thou, my sweet Eliakim, lay here,
Close to the book of God, this diadem.
Levite, it is Jehoiada's command,
Let David's sword be placed beside his crown.

JOASH.

Dear Princess, tell me, what new sight is this ?
The sacred scroll, the sword, the diadem ?
Since God within His Temple shelter'd me,
No preparation have I seen like this.

JEHOSHEBA.

Soon will thy wondering doubts be clear'd, my son.

JOASH.

Try not that diadem upon my brow !
'Tis profanation of the glorious dead !
The King who wore it claims more reverence.
A poor unhappy child, left for the bears—

JEHOSHEBA (*trying the crown upon him*).

Let be, my son : thus has it been enjoin'd.

JOASH.

But do I hear thee sob ? Princess, thy cheeks
Are wet with tears ! What pity touches thee ?
Am I, as Jephthah's daughter was of old,
To be presented for a sacrifice,
And, by my death, appease the wrath of God ?
A son has naught his Father may not claim.
Ah me !

JEHOSHEBA.

Lo, here is one who will declare God's will
To thee, alone : fear not.

Come, let us go.

Scene 2.

JOASH, JEHOIADA.

JOASH (*running into the High Priest's arms*).
Father ?

JEHOIADA.

My son !

JOASH.

What preparation's here ?

JEHOIADA.

'Tis right, my son, that thou should'st know the truth,
And, sooner than all others, learn God's will,
His purpose for His people and for thee.
Arm thee with courage, and renew thy faith.
The time is come to prove that fervent zeal
Which I have cherish'd in thy heart with care,
And to discharge the debt due to thy God.
Art thou resolv'd to show a generous mind ?

JOASH.

Yea, ready if He will to give my life.

JEHOIADA.

Oft hast thou heard the story of our kings ;
Dost bear in mind, my son, how strict the laws
A king must follow, worthy of the crown ?

JOASH.

Wise kings, for thus hath God Himself declared,
Will not rely on riches and on gold, .
But fear the Lord their God, regarding still
His precepts, and His judgments, and His laws,
Nor yoke oppressive on their brethren lay.

JEHOIADA.

But wert thou bound to copy one such king,
Which would'st thou choose to imitate, my son ?

JOASH.

There seems to me none worthy to compare
With faithful David, full of love divine.

JEHOIADA.

Thou would'st not follow then the erring steps
Of faithless Joram and his impious son?

JOASH.

Father!

JEHOIADA.

Proceed, and tell me all thy mind.

JOASH.

Whoso resembles them perish as they!

(JEHOIADA *prostrates himself at his feet.*)

Father, why dost thou kneel before my face?

JEHOIADA.

I pay thee the respect I owe my King.
Joash, prove worthy of thine ancestor,
Of David.

JOASH.

Am I Joash?

JEHOIADA.

Thou shalt know
How graciously God foil'd the savage plot
Of Athaliah, saving thee from death,
Already with the dagger in thy breast.
Nor from her fury art thou yet escaped:
With the same eagerness that would erewhile
Have slain in thee her son's posterity,
Her cruelty is bent on thy destruction,
Nor does a change of name elude pursuit.
But 'neath thy standard I have gather'd here,

Prompt to ~~avenge~~ thee, an obedient band.
Enter, brave captains of the holy seed,
Honour'd by sacred service in your turns.

Scene 3.

JEHOIADA, JOASH, AZARIAH, ISHMAEL, AND THE THREE
OTHER CHIEFS OF THE LEVITES.

JEHOIADA (*continues*).

Lo there, the King's avengers 'gainst his foes!
And there, ye priests, behold your promised King!

AZARIAH.

Why, 'tis Eliakim!

ISHMAEL.

Is that sweet child—

JEHOIADA.

The rightful heir of Judah's kings, the last
Of hapless Ahaziah's lineage,
Call'd by the name of Joash, as ye know.
All Judah, like yourselves, bewail'd the fate
Of that fair tender flow'r so soon cut down,
Believing him with all his brethren slain.
With them he met the traitor's cruel knife:
But Heaven turn'd aside the mortal stroke,
Kept in his heart the smouldering spark of life,
And let my wife, eluding watchful eyes,
Convey him in her bosom, bathed in blood,
And hid him in the Temple with his nurse,
Being sole accomplice of her theft.

JOASH.

Ah, how, my father, can I e'er repay
The kindness and the love so freely giv'n?

JHROIADA.

The time will come to prove that gratitude.
Look then upon your King, your only hope !
My care^s has been to keep him for this hour ;
Servants of God, 'tis yours that care to crown.
The child of Jezebel, the murderess queen,
Inform'd that Joash lives, will soon be here,
Opening for him the tomb a second time,
His death determined, though himself unknown.
Priests, 'tis for you her fury to forestall,
And Judah's shameful slavery to end,
Avenge your princes slain, your Law restore,
Make Benjamin and Judah own their King.
The enterprise, no doubt, is dangerous,
Attacking a proud queen upon her throne,
Who rallies to her standard a vast host
Of hardy strangers and of faithless Jews :
But He who guides and strengthens me is God.
Think, on this child all Israel's hope depends.
The wrath of God already marks the Queen ;
Here have I muster'd you, in her despite,
Nor lack ye warlike arms as she believes.
Haste, crown we Joash, and proclaim him King,
Then, our new Prince's valiant soldiers, march,
Calling on Him with Whom all victory lies,
And, waking loyalty in slumbering hearts,
E'en to her palace track our enemy.
What hearts, so sunk in sloth's inglorious sleep,
Will not be roused to follow in our steps,
When in our sacred ranks they see advance
A King whom God has at His altar fed,
Aaron's successor, and a train of priests
Leading to battle Levi's progeny,
And in those self-same hands, by all revered,
The arms that David hallow'd to the Lord ?
Our God shall spread His terror o'er His foes.
Shrink not from bathing you in heathen blood ;
Hew down the Tyrians, yea, and Jacob's seed.
Are ye not from those famous Levites sprung
Who, when inconstant Israel wickedly

At Sinai worshipp'd the Egyptian god,
 Their dearest kinsmen slew with righteous zeal,
 And sanctified their hands in traitors' blood,
 Gaining the honour, by this noble deed,
 Of serving at the altars of the Lord?

But I perceive your zeal already fired;
 Swear then upon this holy volume, first,
 Before this King whom Heav'n restores to-day,
 To live, to fight, yea, or to die for him!

AZARIAH.

Here swear we, for ourselves and brethren all,
 To establish Joash on his fathers' throne,
 Nor, having taken in our hands the sword,
 To lay it down till we have slain his foes.
 If anyone of us should break this vow,
 Let him, great God, and let his children feel
 Thy vengeance, from Thine heritage shut out,
 And number'd with the dead disown'd by Thee!

JEHOIADA.

And thou, my King, wilt thou not swear to be
 Faithful to this eternal Law of God?

JOASH.

How could I ever wish to disobey?

JEHOIADA.

My son,—once more to call thee by that name,—
 Suffer this fondness, and forgive the tears
 Prompted by too well founded fears for thee.
 Far from the throne, in ignorance brought up
 Of all the poisonous charms of royalty,
 Thou knowest not th' intoxicating fumes
 Of pow'r uncurb'd, and flattery's magic spells;
 Soon will she whisper that the holiest laws,
 Tho' governing the herd, must kings obey;
 A monarch owns no bridle but his will;
 All else must bow before his majesty;
 Subjects are rightly doom'd to toil and tears,

And with a rod of iron should be ruled,
For they will crush him if they be not crush'd.
Thus will fresh pitfalls for your feet be dug,
New snares be spread to spoil your innocence,
Till they have made you hate the truth at last,
By painting virtue in repulsive guise.
Alas! our wisest king was led astray.
Swear on this book, before these witnesses,
That God shall be thy first and constant care;
Scourge of the evil, refuge of the good,
That you will judge the poor as God directs;
Rememb'ring how, in simple linen clad,
Thou wast thyself a helpless orphan child.

JOASH.

I promise to observe the Law's commands.
If I forsake Thee, punish me, my God!

JEHOIADA.

I must anoint thee with the holy oil.
Jehosheba, thou mayest show thyself.

Scene 4.

JOASH, JEHOIADA, JEHOSHEBA, ZACHARIAH, SALOME,
AZARIAH, ISHMAEL, THE THREE OTHER CHIEFS OF THE
LEVITES, THE CHORUS.

JEHOSHEBA (*embracing JOASH*).

My King, and son of David!

JOASH.

Mother dear,

My only mother! Zachariah, come,
Embrace thy brother.

JEHOSHEBA (*to ZACHARIAH*).

Kneel before thy king.

(ZACHARIAH casts himself at the feet of JOASH.)

JEHOIADA (*while they embrace one another*).
My children be united ever thus!

JEHOSHEBA (*to JOASH*).
Thou knowest then whose blood has giv'n thee life?

JOASH.
And who had robb'd me of it, but for thee.

JEHOSHEBA.
I then may call thee Joash, thy true name.

JOASH.
And thee shall Joash never cease to love.

THE CHORUS.
Why, there is—

JEHOSHEBA.
Joash.

JEHOIADA.
Hear this messenger.

Scene 5.

JOASH, JEHOIADA, JEHOSHEBA, ZACHARIAH, SALOME,
AZARIAH, ISHMAEL, THE THREE OTHER CHIEFS OF THE
LEVITES, A LEVITE, THE CHORUS.

A LEVITE.
I know not what their impious plan may be,
But everywhere resounds the threatening tramp,
And amid standards fires are seen to shine;
The Queen is doubtless mustering her troops;
Already, every way of succour closed,
The sacred mount on which the Temple stands
Insolent Tyrians on all sides invest;

And one of these blasphemers now brings word
That Abner is in chains, so cannot help.

JEHOSHEBA (*to JOASH*).

Ah! dearest child, by Heav'n in vain restored,
Alas! for safety I can do no more.
God has forgotten David and his seed!

JEHOIADA (*to JEHOSHEBA*).

Dost thou not fear to draw the wrath divine
Down on thyself, and on the King thou lovest?
And e'en tho' God should snatch him from thine arms,
And will that David's house perish with him,
Art thou not here upon the holy hill,
Where Abraham our father raised his hand
Obediently to slay his blameless son,
Nor murmur'd as he to the altar bound
The fruit of his old age; leaving to God
Fulfilment of His promise, though this son
Held in himself the hope of all his race?

Friends, let us take our several posts: the side
That looks towards the east let Ishmael guard;
Guard thou the north; thou, west; and thou the south.
Take heed that no one, with imprudent zeal,
Levite or priest, unmasking my designs,
Burst forth in headlong haste before the time;
Let each, as with one common will inspired,
Wherever placed, till death his post maintain.
Our foes regard you, in their blinded rage,
As timid flocks for slaughter set aside,
And think that ye will scatter in dismay.

Let Azariah on the King attend.

(*To JOASH*.)

Come, precious scion of a vigorous stock,
And with fresh courage thy defenders fill;
Come, don the diadem before their eyes,
And die, if it must be so, like a King.

(To JEHOSEBA.)

Follow him, Princess.

(To a LEVITE.)

Give me thou those arms.

(To the CHORUS.)

Offer to God the tears of innocence.

Scene 6.

SALOME, THE CHORUS.

ALL THE CHORUS *sings*.

Go forth, ye sons of Aaron, go :

Never did cause of greater fame

The spirit of your sires inflame.

Go forth, ye sons of Aaron, go :

'Tis for your God and King this day ye strike the blow.

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

Hast Thou no shafts in store,

That Justice may let fly?

Art Thou the jealous God no more,

No longer God of Vengeance throned on high?

ANOTHER VOICE.

Where, God of Jacob, is Thy goodness fled?

With horrors all around us pressing near,

Have but our sins a voice which Thou canst hear?

Wilt Thou on us no more Thy pardon shed?

ALL THE CHORUS.

Where is Thine ancient lovingkindness fled?

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

'Tis against Thee that in this fray,
 The wicked set the arrow to the bow ;
 " Let us destroy His feasts," say they,
 " No longer let the earth His worship show ;
 Nor his vexatious yoke let mortals longer know. "
 His altars overturn, His votaries slay,
 Till of His name and glory
 Remains not e'en the story ;
 Of Him and His Anointed break the sway."

ALL THE CHORUS.

Hast Thou no shafts in store,
 That Justice may let fly ?
 Art Thou the jealous God no more,
 No longer God of Vengeance throned on high ?

ONE VOICE (*alone*).

Sad relic of our kings,
 Last precious blossom of a stem so fair,
 Ah ! will the knife this time refuse to spare,
 Which to his breast a cruel parent brings ?
 Tell us, sweet Prince, if o'er thy cradle hovered
 Some Angel that protected thee from death ?
 Or did thy lifeless form in darkness covered,
 At God's awakening voice resume its breath ?

ANOTHER VOICE.

Great God, dost Thou the guilt upon him lay,
 That his rebellious sires forsook Thy way ?
 Is Thy compassion then clean gone for aye ?

THE CHORUS.

Where, God of Jacob, is Thy goodness fled ?
 Wilt Thou no more Thy gracious pardon shed ?

ONE OF THE MAIDENS OF THE CHORUS
(*speaking, not singing*).

Dear sisters, cruel Tyrians hem us round,
 Do ye not hear their trumpets' dreadful sound ?

SALOME.

Yea, and I hear them raise their savage cry ;
I tremble with alarm ;
Haste, let us to our place of refuge fly,
Where God's Almighty Arm
Shall in His Temple shelter us from harm.

A C T V.

Scene 1.

ZACHARIAH, SALOME, THE CHORUS.

SALOME.

What news, dear Zachariah, dost thou bring ?

ZACHARIAH.

Double the fervour of your prayers to Heav'n !
Sister, our latest hour perhaps draws nigh.
For the dread conflict orders have been giv'n.

SALOME.

And what does Joash ?

ZACHARIAH.

He has just been crown'd,
And by the High Priest with the holy oil
Anointed. Oh, what joy in every eye
Welcomed a sovereign ransom'd from the tomb,
A scar still showing where the dagger fell !
There too might have been seen his faithful nurse,
Who, almost hidden in a far recess,
Was watching her loved charge, tho' none but God
And our dear mother witness'd her concern.
Our Levites wept in tenderness and joy,
Mingling with sobs their cries of glad delight : *
He 'mid these transports, all untouch'd by pride,

Gave gracious smiles, words, pressure of the hand ;
And, swearing to conform with their advice,
This one his father, that his brother call'd.

SALOME.

And has our secret reach'd the world without ?

ZACHARIAH.

'Tis known to none beyond the Temple walls.
The sons of Levi, in divided bands,
Are ranged in solemn silence at the doors,
All in an instant ready to rush forth
And raise the signal shout, "Long live the King!"
But Azariah has been strictly charged
To guard the Prince's life from any risk.
Meanwhile the scornful Queen, dagger in hand,
Laughs at our frail defence of brazen doors,
Awaits the engines that shall break them down,
And threatens blood and ruin with each breath.
Some priests, my sister, ventured to advise
That in a crypt, dug in the days of old,
We should at least the precious Ark conceal;
"Such fears insult our God," my father said,
"Shall then the Ark that caused proud towers to fall,
That drove the waters of the Jordan back,
And shatter'd to the earth Philistia's gods,
Flee from before a shameless woman's face!"
Our mother, standing near in mortal dread,
Now to the Prince, now to the altar turns
Her wavering glance, yielding to mute alarm,
A sight to make a very savage weep.
From time to time the King, with fond embrace,
Soothes her—Dear sisters, follow in my steps,
And, if this day our King is doom'd to die,
Let the same fate with him unite us all.

SALOME.

What rude hand knocks with quick repeated strokes ?
What makes these Levites in confusion run ?

Why with such caution do they hide their arms?
Say, is the Temple forced?

ZACHARIAH.

Your fears dispel,
God sends us Abner.

Scene 2.

JEHOIADA, JEHOSEBA, ZACHARIAH, SALOME, ABNER,
ISHMAEL, TWO LEVITES, THE CHORUS.

JEHOIADA.

Can I trust mine eyes?
How did dear Abner find his way to us,
Right through the enemy's blockading camp?
'Twas said that Athaliah, to insure
The execution of her cruel plots,
Had bound in iron chains thy generous hands.

ABNER.

My lord, she fear'd my courage and my zeal,
And worse than fetters gave me for reward,
Confining me within a loathsome den,
To wait until the Temple should be burn'd,
And she, unsated still with streams of blood,
Should come to free me from an irksome life,
And cut short days, which sorrows to survive
My princes should have ended long ago.

JEHOIADA.

What miracle procured thee thy release?

ABNER.

God only knows how works her cruel heart.
She sent for me; and said with anxious air,—
"Thou seest this temple by my troops beset:
Soon will the vengeful flames but ashes leave,

In spite of all thy god can do to save.
Yet upon two conditions may his priests
Redeem their lives, but no time must be lost,
That in my pow'r they place Eliakim,
With treasure known to them, and them alone,
Amass'd by David when he reign'd of yore,
And left a secret in the High Priest's charge,
Go, tell them on these terms I let them live."

JEHOIADA.

What course, dear Abner, thinkest thou the best?

ABNER.

Give her the gold, if it indeed be true,
That in thy keeping David's treasure lies,
And all besides, that from her greedy hands
Thou hitherto hast saved, precious and rare.
Give all; or thou wilt have vile murderers come,
To break the altar, burn the cherubim,
And, on our sacred Ark laying rude hands,
Stain with thy priestly blood the inner shrine.

JEHOIADA.

But, Abner, how can I in honour yield
To punishment a poor unhappy child,
Whom God Himself intrusted to my care,
And save our lives by sacrificing his?

ABNER.

Would to Almighty God, Who sees my heart,
That Athaliah might forget the boy,
And be content her cruelty to slake
With Abner's blood, thinking thereby to soothe
Her angry gods! but what avails your care?
If ye all perish, will he die the less?
Does God command what is impossible?
When, in obedience to a tyrant's law,
His mother trusted Moses to the Nile,
Almost as soon as born, condemn'd to die;

Yet God, against all hope, his life preserved,
And made the King himself his childhood fear.
Who knows His purpose tow'rd Eliakim ?
E'en such a lot may be for him in store,
And the fell murderess of the royal seed
Be render'd sensitive to pity's touch.
Not long ago I saw steal o'er her face
A tender look, that by Jehoshéba
Was mark'd as well, calming her wrathful mood.
Princess, the hour of danger claims thy voice !
What ! Shall Jehoiada, with thy consent,
For a mere stranger, let his son and thee,
Yea all this people, fruitlessly be slain,
And flames devour the only spot on earth
Where God is worshipp'd ? What could ye do more,
Were he the solo survivor of our Kings,
Your ancestors ?

JEHOSHEBA (*aside to JEHOIADA*).

Thou seest his loyal heart ;
Tell him the truth.

JEHOIADA.

The time is not yet come.

ABNER.

Time is more precious than thou thinkest, Sir.
While thou art doubting what reply to give,
Mattan, at Athaliah's ear, demands,
Burning with rage, a speedy massacre.
Must I fall prostrate at thy hallow'd knees ?
Now in the name of that Most Holy Place,
Unseen by mortal eye save thine, where dwells
God's glory ; howsoever hard the task,
Let us think how to meet the sudden blow.
I only beg a moment's breathing space :
To-morrow, yea to-night, I will secure
The Temple, and make outrage dangerous.
But I perceive my words are lost on thee,
Tears and entreaties pow'rless to persuade,

Too strict thy sense of duty to give way.
Well, find me then some weapon, spear or sword,
And, where the foe await me, at these gates,
Abner at least can die a soldier's death.

JEHOIADA.

I yield. Your proffer'd counsel I embrace :
Abner, we will avert these threaten'd ills.
'Tis true that David left a treasure here,
That to my charge was trusted, the last hope
Left to the Jews in their calamities ;
My watchful care bestowed it secretly,
But, since we cannot hide it from your Queen,
She shall be satisfied, and through these doors
Enter, attended by her officers ;
But from these altars let her keep afar
The savage fury of her foreign troops,
And spare the House of God from pillage dire.
Arrange with her the number of her train,
Children and priests can small suspicion rouse.

Touching this child she dreads so much, to thee,
Knowing thine upright heart, I will unfold
The secret of his birth, when she can hear ;
And thou shalt judge between us, if I must
Place this young boy in Athaliah's pow'r.

ABNER.

I take him under my protection now ;
Fear naught, my lord. Back to the Queen I haste.

Scene 3.

JEHOIADA, JEHOSHEBA, ZACHARIAH, SALOME, ISHMAEL,
TWO LEVITES, THE CHORUS.

JEHOIADA.

Great God ! The hour is come that brings Thy prey !
Hark, Ishmael.

(He whispers in his ear.)

JEHOSHĒBA.

Almighty King of Heav'n,
Place a thick veil before her eyes once more,
As when, making her crime of none effect,
Thou in my bosom didst her victim hide.

JEHOIADA.

Good Ishmael, go, there is no time to lose;
Fulfil precisely this important task;
And, above all, take heed, when she arrives
And passes, that no threatening signs be seen.
Children, for Joash be a throne prepared;
Let our arm'd Levites on his steps attend.
Princess, bring hither too his trusty nurse,
And dry the copious fountain of thy tears.

(To a LEVITE.)

Soon as the Queen, madly presumptuous,
Has cross'd the threshold of the Temple gates,
Let all retreat be made impossible;
That very moment let the martial trump
Wake sudden terror in the hostile camp:
Call all the people to support their King,
And make her ears ring with the wondrous tale
Of Joash by God's providence preserved.
He comes.

Scene 4.

JEHOIADA, JEHOSEBA, ZACHARIAH, SALOME, JOASH,
AZARIAH, A BAND OF PRIESTS AND LEVITES, THE
CHORUS.

JEHOIADA *continues*.

Ye Levites, and ye priests of God,
Range yourselves round, but do not show yourselves;
Leave it to me to keep your zeal in check,
And tarry till my voice bids you appear.

(They all hide themselves.)

My King, methinks this hope rewards thy vows;
 Come, see thy foes fall prostrate at thy feet.
 She who in fury sought thine infant life
 Comes hither in hot haste to slay thee now;
 But fear her not: think that upon our side
 Stands the destroying angel as thy guard.
 Ascend thy throne—The gates are opening wide;
 One moment let this curtain cover thee.

(He draws a curtain.)

Princess, thy colour changes.

JEHOSHEBA.

Can I see
 Assassins fill God's house, and not grow pale?
 Why, look how numerous the retinue—

JEHOIADA.

I see them shut the Temple doors again.
 All is secure.

Scene 5.

JOASH, JEHOIADA, JEHOSHEBA, ABNER, ATHALIAH,
 AND HER ATTENDANTS.

(JOASH is hidden behind the curtain.)

ATHALIAH *(to JEHOIADA)*.

Deceiver, there thou art!
 Author of mischief, plots, conspiracies,
 Whose hopes are all upon disturbance based,
 Inveterate foe of sovereign majesty!
 Dost thou still lean upon thy god's support,
 Or has that flimsy trust forsaken thee?
 He leaves thee and thy temple in my pow'r.
 Well might I on the altar thou dost serve—
 But no, thine offer'd ransom shall suffice;
 Fulfil what thou hast promised. That young boy,
 That treasure which thou must to me resign,
 Where are they?

JEHOIADA.

Straight shalt thou be satisfied :
I am about to show them both at once.

(The curtain is drawn up. JOASH is discovered on his throne; his nurse is kneeling on his right; AZARIAH, sword in hand, is standing on his left; and near him ZACHARIAH and SALOME are kneeling on the steps of the throne; a number of LEVITES, with swords in their hands, are ranged on either side.)

Appear, dear child, worthy of royal sires.
Queen, dost thou recognize King David's heir?
Observe at least these marks thy dagger left:
Behold thine offspring, Ahaziah's son!
Welcome King Joash, Abner, people all!

ABNER.

Heav'ns!

ATHALIAH.

Traitor!

JEHOIADA.

See this fait^hful Jewess here,
Whose bosom, as thou knowest, nursed him then.
Saved from thy fury by Jehosheba,
Within this temple God has guarded him.
Lo, here is all of David's treasure left!

ATHALIAH.

Traitor, thy fraud will but destroy the child:
Rid me, my soldiers, of this vile pretence!

JEHOIADA.

Soldiers of God, draw near, defend your King:

(The back of the stage opens: the interior of the temple is shown; and armed LEVITES enter from all around upon the stage.)

ATHALIAH.

Treason! Oh, where am I, unhappy Queen!
Weapons and enemies on every side!

JEHOIADA.

Thy search is vain, thou canst not 'scape the toils
Cast round thee by the God whom thou hast scorn'd.
Into our hands has He deliver'd thee;
Drunken with blood He calls thee to His bar.

ATHALIAH.

My warriors are turn'd craven, numb with fear:
Abner, is this thy coward's snare?

ABNER.

My Queen,
As God is witness—

ATHALIAH.

Never mind thy god,
Avenge me.

ABNER (*throwing himself at the feet of JOASH*).

Upon whom? Joash? My prince?

ATHALIAH.

He Joash! He thy King! Bethink you, knaves,
That ye are still beleaguer'd by my arms;
I hear my soldiers call me with loud shouts.
Tremble, ye rebels! Succour is at hand.

Scene 6

JOASH, ATHALIAH, JEHOIADA, ISHMAEL, and all the actors
in the preceding scene.

ISHMAEL (to JEHOIADA).

My lord, our foes have left the Temple free :
The foreigners are fled, the Jews submit.
As smoke is driv'n away before the wind,
Th' Almighty's voice this army has dispersed.
Our Levites, high above the courts around,
Have Ahaziah's son to all proclaim'd,
Told of his infant life saved from the sword,
And Athaliah's fall into the snare.
The trumpets sounded from all sides at once,
And, mingled with their cries, such terror spread
Throughout the camp as struck with wild dismay
Proud Midian at the flash of Gideon's sword.
The Tyrians, casting arms and shields away,
The first, in all directions disappear'd.
Some Jews, in dazed confusion, shared their flight ;
The rest for Joash loudly have declared,
Owning herein the guiding hand of God.
Yea, all the people, with one heart inspired,
Women, old men, and babes embrace with joy,
Blessing Jehovah and the King He sends,
And hymn the son of David raised to life.
All in the holy city execrate
The name of Baal, and destroy his shrine.
Mattan is slain.

ATHALIAH.

Jehovah, thou hast won !
Yes, it is Joash. Vain denial now !
'Twas here I gave command to have him slain ;
He has the mien and features of his sire ;
I trace his kinship with the line I hate.
Thus David triumphs, Ahab is destroy'd.
Relentless god, this is thy work alone,

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With hopes of easy vengeance luring me,
 And twenty times a day setting my thoughts
 In conflict, now remorseful for this child,
 Now dazzled with the prospect of rich spoil,
 And loath to give it to devouring flames.
 Well, let him reign, thy care and handiwork !
 And, to inaugurate his sovereignty,
 Bid him direct this dagger to my heart !
 This for my grandson is my dying wish, —
 My wish, nay more than wish, my trust and hope ;
 That weary of thy law, thy yoke condemn'd,
 True to the blood of Ahab, drawn from me,
 Following his grandsire's and his father's steps,
 He, David's heir, shall make himself abhorr'd.
 Profane thine altar, rob thee of thy rites,
 So avenge Ahab, Jezebel, and me !

(ATHALIAH goes out, the Levites follow her.)

JEHOIADA.

Out of the Temple precincts have her forth
 At once, nor be its holy courts profaned.
 Go, and avenge your princes massacred,
 Whose blood cries out till pacified by hers.
 If any venture to defend her cause,
 Him let the sword, along with her, devour.

Scene 7.

JOASH, JEHOIADA, JEHOSEBA, ABNER, and all the actors
 in the preceding scene.

JOASH (after descending from his throne).

Thou seest, O Lord, the anguish of my soul,
 Oh, turn her malediction from me far,
 And never suffer it to be fulfill'd !
 Let Joash die ere he forgets his God !

JEHOIADA (to the Levites).

Call all the people, they shall see their King.

Let them approach, and fresh allegiance swear.
King, priests, and people, let us all confirm
The covenant that Jacob made with God;
Grateful for mercy, for our sins ashamed,
And with new vows binding ourselves to Him.
Abner, resume thy post beside the King.

Scene 8.

JOASH, JEHOIADA, A LEVITE, and all the actors in the
preceding scene.

JEHOIADA (*to the Levite*).

Well, has that monster met with punishment?

THE LEVITE.

Her guilt has been atoned for with the sword.
Jerusalem, so long her fury's prey,
Relieved at last from her detested yoke.
With joy beholds her weltering in her blood.

JEHOIADA.

By this, the dreadful end her crimes deserved,
Learn, King of Judah, nor this truth forget:—
Kings have in Heav'n their Judge severe, Who to the
fatherless
Is Father, and will punish those who innocence oppress!

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